MISTRAL

MAX BRAND

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By **MAX BRAND**

Author of "The Gun Tamer," etc.

THIS is the story of Mistral, a magnificent gray-white stallion, swift and fierce as the wind after which he was named. They called him the "gray fiend" too, for with all his strength and speed, he was tameless and had been twice a "killer."

Said his owner: "He's a devil, Lin. The hell in him never stops boiling, so far as I can make out."

"What difference," answered Lin Bister, who wanted the horse. "If it were hell under forced draft, I'd go there for a brute like that!"

This, therefore, is not only the story of Mistral but of Lin Bister, too, a young man who knew a horse when he saw one, and was willing to sacrifice his heritage, and everything he owned rather than part with the brute. How he tamed Mistral and together with the stallion rode a great race, how treachery and misfortune robbed him of his chance to win, and how the grim hazard he took brought him another last opportunity, make up one of the most thrilling, breath-taking stories Max Brand has written.

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BY MAX BRAND

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Author of "The Blue Jay," "The Gun Tamer"

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CHAPTER I

Five miles out of Borrogate is Eastdown Hill, where all cars change to second and some go down to first; but that is going east, and Lindley Bister was going west. At the verge of the long descent he stopped his car and looked over the smooth metal of the road, polished by the last shower of the afternoon, and now rosy with the evening light. He had told young Phil Osborne that a coasting car would get to eighty miles an hour at the bottom of that slope, even with a standing start; and Osborne had declared that the thing wasn't possible—besides, no one would be such a fool as to make the experiment, because the main road crossed at the bottom of the hill.

Lindley Bister was not a fool, he hoped, but he saw no good reason why one should not coast down this hill. He worked out the chances mathematically. For suppose that there were thirty automobiles in the mile on the main road and each car occupied five yards, that meant that only a hundred and fifty yards were occupied out of seventeen hundred and sixty. So that the chance was less than one out of ten that there would be a collision at the foot of the hill.

By this you will see that Lindley Givven Bister was of a mathematical turn of mind; and now the mathematician was grinning with pleasure as his machine began to move, surrendered more and more to the pitch of the slope, and now slid on with the long hood of the roadster quivering

with speed. The wind hummed and sang and finally screamed at his ear; but squinting through the gale, he maintained his smile. He was near the bottom of the hill now, when he saw the flash of a headlight on the main road, and then the sweeping lamps of another coming the opposite way.

He could see that it would be a rather close thing—but what a crushing he could give Osborne when they met again! For as he snapped the switchboard light on and off again he had a glimpse of the speedometer with the number seventy-five crawling rapidly across its face. Just then the car took wings down the final slope and even the mathematical mind of Mr. Bister was blurred a little by the speed.

They hit the surface of the main road with a stagger, just in time to see a gleaming great limousine thrust its nose in their line. One could not swerve sharply, at such a speed, without beginning to roll like a little round stone, but Lindley Bister gave his car all it would stand and skimmed past the spare tires of the limousine on two wheels. Dimly, from the rear, he heard a scream and a roar of curses, but a turn of the road blotted out these sounds.

"It must have been close to ninety-five, across that road," he meditated.

Next to a good horse, there was certainly a place in the world for a good automobile!

But he quite forgot all other matters in a new concern: with the momentum which he had gained, could he rush Chadwick Hill on top? It was just as steep as Eastdown, but much shorter; so he pushed the accelerator to the

floor and stormed Chadwick Hill like a mad young colt. Near the top the car wavered a bit. But a horse that won't be winded and go on is no good; and an engine that won't stand a strain isn't worth having.

Over the brow of Chadwick Hill, therefore, at a labored ten miles an hour, went the roadster, and with a throbbing motor began to gather impetus once more. But even Lindley Bister had enough speed to satisfy him for the nonce; he let the car slip idly on at forty and turned his eyes towards Appleton Hill, now black against the west, with the ruins of the old Snydam Mill looking down at him from the crest. No Bister could go past this place without serious thoughts, and young Lindley with a gleaming eye called up that picture out of the past which his grandfather never failed to paint for him on the fourth of October of every year.

For on the head of that rise of ground, many a season past, old General Bister had reined his horse and watched a tired fox run over Borrogate Meadows, the hounds strung out half-beaten, the M. F. H., the whippers-in, and all the hunt dead and gone except Ned Sherdon on his new gray stallion. Lindley's grandfather, Colonel Bister, always swore that it was the sight of a Sherdon coming up for the kill that maddened the old general, for as long as men could remember, the Sherdons and the Bisters had been deadly rivals; there was such bad blood between them as would have made a feud, had their setting been a little farther south. Now the general saw the fox double about and make his point for Borrogate Woods where big earths were known to lie open. With that turn, Sidney Bister heard the whole cry of the pack

well up in music from the Meadows; he saw the trailing brush of the fox, with the dogs gaining every stride and worst of all, young Ned Sherdon's gray going gallantly along and flying the creek in noble style. The heart of the general swelled. That day he rode the apple of his eye, the good horse Sarpedon, rich in the old Prince Regent blood. Perhaps Sarpedon pressed to be gone; perhaps it was the clear beauty of the day; but most of all it was sight of Ned Sherdon riding alone to the kill that must have worked like magic in the soul of Sidney Bister, so that he forgot the terrible perils that lay between him and the foot of Appleton Hill. At any rate, young Sherdon heard a hunter's cheer ring down against the wind, and looking up, he saw the general on brown Sarpedon jump the hedge beside Snydam's Mill and pitch down the slope. The stone fence shut them out of view; but mighty Sarpedon cleared that fence. Sherdon saw the good horse rise, and the general with hat blown off and white hair streaming; it seemed hardly possible that horse and man could have gone so far down that treacherous slope, but surely the gaping chasm of Snydam Creek would stop them. No, they flew the gorge—a thing to be dreamed of but never credited!—and flinging on, Sarpedon cleared the high rail fence which stood at the top of the last and steepest part of the hill. The children of Borrogate knew that place. They came there in the snows of the winter with their sleighs, and the dizzy fall of ground mastered Sarpedon at last. He strove to sit down on his haunches and slide the distance to the level where the hounds were now closing on their quarry, but

Sherdon saw the brown horse swerve, right himself, swerve again, and then topple headlong.

Right among the pack as the hounds made the kill, fell the two. Sherdon found brown Sarpedon dead as he came up, but General Sidney Bister lived for ten seconds in the arms of the youngster before he gave up the ghost with a smile.

These things shot through the mind of Lindley Bister as the car went past; that hunt was famous in story and legend, now, as the Bister Run. Thirty-five miles the pack had traveled and some swore that the fox had not changed before them. At any rate, the brush of the fox hung in Bister Hall to this day, and Lindley was not sure that too high a price had been paid for it! A dream began to rise before him, dimming his eyes; but the dream vanished all at once as he saw the twinkling of a light behind three tall, familiar fir trees at the entrance to Borrogate village.

He remembered now that the night was cold, and jumping the car across the road, he swerved it up the driveway and came to a stop behind the tavern. The back door was thrust open at once.

"Hey, Tommy! Did you bring up them potatoes?" bellowed a rich, deep voice.

"That ain't Tommy and the Ford," piped a youngster. "I know the sound of his engine."

"It's I," said Bister, coming out of the dark. "How are you, Clancy?"

"Tired!" said Clancy Muldoon. "Tired of damnin' Tommy. If he ain't late, he's always forgetting. Usually

he's both. Come in and have something to warm you up. This'll put heart in the foxes, this weather, Mr. Bister."

"I hope so," said the heir of Bister, rubbing his hands as he entered. "The sleepy devils would rather die than run, lately."

"Foxes and men are goin' down hill," said Clancy Muldoon. "How can they help it in prohibition days, eh?"

They passed through the kitchen into a long, narrow barroom which widened at the farther end enough to allow a stove to be placed there, and surrounded by a circle of old leather-cushioned chairs. This had been a famous room in the old days. In this very room General Washington had asked for a glass of the Muldoon cider, and the great-great-great-great-grandfather of Clancy Muldoon had handed the drink to the hero. It was hard to tell whether the thought did more to humanize the memory of the first president or to dignify the room; for a dignity it had, in spite of its splintery floor and broken windows where half the panes were glass and half were broad, thin boards from apple boxes.

"Why are you damning prohibition, when you know you're getting rich by it, Clancy? What is there to drink? Is there any of that Canadian ale?"

"There is, Mr. Bister, but I wouldn't be wronging you by offering it to you when I've got something better." He lowered his voice to confidential tones. "I've had a barrel of cider froze, sir. And just this morning I bored through the ice and tapped it. There was sixty gallons that have boiled down to fifteen. You look here, will you?"

He poured out a glass of amber liquor; and Lindley Bister breathed of a light, chilly fragrance.

"Smell it, Mr. Bister," urged the tavernkeeper. "Pure essence of apple blossoms, I tell you. You never laid your lip over nothing finer!"

"Isn't there anyone here to drink with us?"

"No, sir," hesitated Muldoon.

"Who is it?"

"Only Tim McFarland."

"Bring him in."

"You don't mind?"

"I'd love to see Tim again."

Muldoon, with a grin, opened an inner door. "Tim, you're wanted!"

A youth with a pale face and a broad, blunt jaw appeared. He blinked at Lindley Bister. Then: "What's wanted of me, Clancy?"

But young Bister advanced upon him and grasped his hand. "I'm glad to see you, Tim," he assured the other. "Come and have a drink with me."

"Do you mean it, sir?"

"Of course I mean it. Let's have another glass on the bar."

"Mr. Lindley, I don't know that the Colonel would be pleased if he was to know that you'd had a drink with me!"

"The Colonel doesn't live in my skin, and I don't live in his. How long have you been out?"

"Only three weeks, sir." And Tim passed a thoughtful hand over his cropped head.

"And are you working for Clancy?"

"I'm just staying here while I look around."

"Look me in the eye. Clancy is using you for his infernal bootlegging."

"No, sir, as a matter of fact."

"Don't lie to me, McFarland. You come home with me to-night; I'll see that you get honest work."

"The Colonel would——"

"I'll manage that. Go pack your bag."

"Ain't got a bag, Mr. Lindley."

"Then come as you are. We need an extra man with the horse, at that."

"If you can trust me, Mr. Lindley——" began the other with a white face.

"Nonsense! Trust yourself, and the whole world will trust you."

Tim looked suddenly down to the floor. "There's your glass waiting for you, Tim. Come on, Clancy. A long life and a lucky one to Tim McFarland. Down with it!"

They drank, looking at one another and not at Tim, whose face could not endure inspection for the moment; there was no murmur of acknowledgment from him while he swallowed his drink after the manner of one who needed it.

"Lovely stuff!" said Bister. "Attar of roses and cider combined, I'd say. Freeze a pair of barrels for me, will you?"

"You're feeling your blood a bit, sir," said Clancy Muldoon, filling the glasses.

"I was at the races this afternoon and watched my

horse win at twenty-five to one, Clancy. Confound me, I only had a hundred on it!"

Muldoon rolled his eyes at the ceiling. "I'd call it tender and juicy—twenty-five hundred!" said he. "Who passed you the tip?"

"My own eyes, Clancy. My own eyes! I wouldn't give a damn for a bet on another man's thinking. I only saw her in the paddock, and I thought she was a bit weak behind. But shoulders you would love; and she had legs. Yards of 'em! It staggered me a bit when I got to the bookies and found out the odds; but after all, a long shot has to win sometime. Why not to-day? I let the bookie keep the hundred because he'd seen it. I didn't want to back out. And the mare won for me! She was nothing at the start, but she collared the field at five furlongs and came away by herself. The jockey braced himself and nearly tore her head in two, but still the rest were five or six lengths behind her tail. Here's to her, God bless her brave little heart!"

The amber liquor vanished and Muldoon tilted the bottle again.

"No more, Clancy! That stuff is singing a song to me already, and I have to be cold sober to-night, because Judge Postlethwaite is down for dinner and the week-end, and the Colonel would never forgive me if I came home a bit on the rosy side."

"Only one more, Mr. Lindley. The cold air'll blow this stuff right out of your head. It ain't like ale or that heavy stuff. It's like foam. Wind'll blow it right out of your head."

"One more, then. But this is the last. Drink up, Tim! Show a bit of heart, man, now that you're back with friends!"

"Friends, sir?" said Tim sadly and bitterly. "They turn their heads when I go past."

"Any cur will bite a man that's down," said Bister, "but the dogs that are worth running with are made of better stuff. This will teach you how to pick and choose. It's a grand world, Tim, but a great lot of broken-winded cripples to run in it and refuse in the pinches. Charge those drinks, Clancy, will you? I'm short."

"Hello, sir! You ain't had twenty-five hundred picked out of your pocket, I hope?"

"No, it was worse robbery than that. What was twenty-five hundred? Only a story and not really enough to warm the blood. I felt like a killing, so I looked down the card and saw Tiptoe in the fifth. He was two to five, or around that. And when I thought back to his breeding I remembered that it was Prince Regent stuff and crossed back on the same, a couple of times."

"You like that blood, Mr. Lindley," ventured Tim McFarland, "but the Colonel hates it, doesn't he?"

"Because a Prince Regent horse killed General Sidney, you know. And because there's a vicious streak in the devils, of course. But they run on, in a race or behind a pack, and that's the main trick. I got my money on Tiptoe and saw him coming grandly a furlong from the finish when the idiot of a jockey rammed him straight into a pocket. A blind man could have ridden better by the sound of the hoofs. It was young Bunce, at that, and he ought to have known better."

"That little hound is crooked as a snake's tail," vowed Muldoon, striking the bar. "You were beaten, then?"

"It was a grand run," said Bister, smiling back at the memory. "Bunce pulled him outside the others, at last, and he sprinted up within a head of the winner. So what's the difference, Clancy? My bet was right, but my jockey was wrong, and next time I'll have better luck, eh?"

"Here's to Tiptoe, and the devil take Bunce!" said Muldoon, filling the glasses.

"I'll drink the first part of that, but not the second. After all, the boy rode the race out!"

"Oh, that's an old trick, sir!—Here's how, Mr. Lindley!—I remember when I was going the rounds in Canada, doing the small-time tracks——"

"Were you up there?"

"Ain't I told you about that? I had a pair of pretty fair horses, but they wasn't cut out for those dinkey little half-mile tracks. They were long-striding boys; and you want a short-gaited thing for that work. I don't think I ever won a race, but I come back with money in my pocket and a good time under my belt."

"How did you juggle the cards, Clancy? We'll have another on the strength of this!"

So the story went on; the bottle was emptied and another produced, and the tide sank to ebb in it also.

"I used to breeze into a town," grinned Muldoon, "and turn loose a boy ahead of me to pass the word that I had something hot with me. The town gamblers would come out and look my work over, and I'd let them see one of my horses do a turn down a straight bit of road.

It used to frighten them to see the long gallop eat up the distance, and they'd forget the turns that the races had to be run around. In the evening one of 'em would come around and offer me a hundred to pull my horse. Why not? The whole game was crooked, anyway. So I made a living by losing races. The rest of the suckers spent horse-flesh, but I was spending brains. I was in a town in Ontario once with a——"

The story was beginning to blur a little in the mind of Bister.

"Another little drink, Clancy."

"Lookout, sir, you're spillin' it."

Tim McFarland stepped closer.

"We'd better start along, sir. The Colonel, you know——"

"Confound the Colonel. Don't tell me what to do, Tim. Clancy, fill them up!"

"Clancy, lay off that stuff," said Tim with firmness.

"Maybe he's right," said Clancy with a sigh. "A bit dizzy, Mr. Lindley?"

"Never clearer in—life. What's masser with you, Tim? One more, Clancy!"

"Mr. Lindley," said Tim, "we got to start."

"It's my closing time," said Muldoon, anxiously.

"Open the door," said Tim softly, "I'll take him."

"You will?" said Bister coldly. "By gad, Tim, do you think that you can manhandle me? There isn't enough of you to—oh, all right, all right! I'll go along if you shay sho."

And so Bister was led from the room with fumbling feet.

"Empty stomach," snarled Clancy Muldoon to Tim on the way to the car. "That's what comes of the swells having late suppers. You can't line a stomach with nothing but hard liquor. Take care of him, Tim," he added as McFarland got into the driver's seat and Lindley Bister was huddled in beside him.

"Lord love you, man," said McFarland, "what else would I do?"

"Clancy!" called Bister.

"Ay, sir."

"I want to hear that old song about the dapple hound and the Peterby fox."

CHAPTER II

Exhorted in this manner, and with the unleashed power of the car tantalizing him, Tim began to raise the required breeze straight through Borrogate village. He missed a ponderous coal truck by an inch as it swung into the main street, and he brushed the whiskers of a frightened man a moment later. Then the law put forth its avenging arm. With the sharp rattle of an open exhaust, a motorcycle drove up beside them and a voice roared like a sea lion's: "Hey, what are you doin'? Gunna turn Borrogate into a cemetery? What's come over ye, Mr. Lindley? By God, it ain't you at the wheel. Stop that car!"

Four brakes were dragging the roadster to a pause.

"Gimme you drivin' license!" demanded the officer, trembling with righteous indignation. "This'll be about a thousand bucks and a stretch up the river for you, or I don't know Judge Morrissey. Am I seein' double? Is that Tim McFarland? McFarland, this'll put you back where you come from! By God, I'm gunna ride you to a——"

"Wait a minute, Tom," called Bister.

"Are you there, sir? Is McFarland drunk?"

"His foot just shlipped—slipped, I mean—on the gas. No harm done, Tom."

"That's it, is it?" said Old Tom, leaning into the car.

"This looks like some of Clancy Muldoon's work, the rascal!"

"Go up and try a glass of that cider, Tom, and charge it to me. But Tim's going to work for me, and we were in a hurry to get home. Lesh see you shmile, Tom, like a good fellow."

"Drive on, sir," said Old Tom, stepping back with a grin. "But you ought to give the town more horn when you're coming through in a hurry. You scared Bill Thompson out of ten years."

"Sorry I didn't, Tom. Bill would look lovely with white whiskers. Give him this five spot, will you, and tell him to spend it with Muldoon. Tom!"

"Ay, sir?"

"Can you sing me that song about the dapple hound and the Peterby fox, Tom?"

"I can't to-night. Mr. Lindley," chuckled the officer of the law. And he added sternly: "Take care of the lad, McFarland, or I'll turn life into hell for you. Get on out of here, now!"

The car moved on.

"Lovely fellow, Old Tom, eh?" said Bister, reclining in the seat. "Simply lovely, Tim!"

But Tim, all his blood congealed with fear, could not answer. Out of a shattered cup of memory, Bister was now pouring forth some strains of the song of the dapple hound and the Peterby fox, and his voice was still raised when Tim said sharply: "Here's Bister Hall sir. You'd better pipe down."

Then: "What time is it?" asked a soberer voice.

"Seven minutes to eight, sir."

"Seven minutes to change. Can I do it? The Colonel will raise the devil if I'm late!"

Tim stopped the car at the back door. He saw his passenger futilely striving to untangle himself from the front seat and get out, and McFarland knew at once that he needed help. So he went to the rear door of the house, and encountered there the tall, spare form of Tod Loomis, the head groom. Mr. Loomis removed a pipe from between his teeth and looked the newcomer up and down. "Well?" he asked. "What'll you have here, McFarland?"

"Nothing for myself," answered Tim McFarland with equal bitterness. "But I've brought home Mr. Lindley, more'n three sheets in the wind. Will you help him into the house?"

"The devil!" said the groom. "The colonel will raise the under side of hell, for this. Is he badly done?"

He pushed past McFarland, gave a glance at the uncertain form beside the automobile, and then called softly over his shoulder: "Charlie! Get Gregory and Chance! Quick!"

A boy scampered down the hall, and Loomis, hurrying out, said under his breath: "Have you had a hand in this, McFarland?"

"I've brought him home," said the injured Tim. "What more d'you want?"

"You're right! You're right!" said Loomis. "But the colonel hates this sort of thing! How long have we got to get him in shape for eight o'clock dinner?"

"Seven minutes."

"It never can be done. How are you, sir?"

"At a check, Tod," said Bister, "and can't pick up the line."

"Cast along with me, sir," said Loomis, taking Bister on one side, while McFarland steadied him on the other. "We'll get on!"

At the door, again, Gregory the butler and Chance the valet met them. They gave the son of the master a single glance and then fell into a serious consultation. Should they report that Mr. Lindley was ill? Should a telephone message be received saying that the car had broken down on the road?

No, none of those things would do. For the Colonel was never interested in words. He wanted action.

"What shall we do, sir? Are you better?"

"Gregory!" said Bister.

The butler stepped forward, and Bister dropped a hand on his shoulder. "Do my thinking for me, Gregory. The clutch is slipping in my brains and I can't make the hill."

"A fine affair," said Gregory sternly, "when a Bister can't manage his liquor better than this. What's to be done? Charlie, go tell the chef that dinner's to be at five minutes past eight."

"He won't dare, Mr. Gregory. He knows the colonel will not have a meal late."

"Do as I tell you. Tell him Mr. Lindley needs a bit of time—and tell him to turn back the clock in the kitchen. Chance!"

"Well?" said the valet.

"Get him upstairs and tear his clothes off, slip him into a tub of cold water, rub him down, and jump him into a dinner-jacket—you and some of the rest."

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"We'll do the work and you'll get the glory, it seems," said Chance bitterly.

"I?" said the butler, in the noble tone of a martyr. "I am going to set the great clock back five minutes!"

And he strode from them with his customary majestic pace, leaving a moment of silence and awe behind him, for in the space of far more than two centuries, the great clock which stood in Bister Hall had never failed to tell the hour truly, and its chimes for two hundred years had told the exact moment of day and night with a deep and mournful voice. So Chance and the others stared at the retreating back of Gregory as the other Titans, on a day of old, must have stared at Prometheus going up to steal the fire of heaven.

They could not pause long, however, for there was much to be done, and the priceless seconds were rushing away. Up the stairs they hurried Bister, begging him to sing the ballad of the dapple hound and the Peterby fox on another day. Then, having conveyed him by secret halls and back ways, they arrived at the chamber which, for ten generations, had been occupied always by the heir of Bister. Chance was the busiest of all, and he likewise was the directing genius, but Loomis, and large-handed McFarland, and two others who appeared in haste, all lent a hand. So the clothes were stripped from Lindley Bister, who was trolling softly and vaguely the tale of the fox and the hound.

Mr. Chance made free with his tongue and his innermost thoughts, as a servant may do who has dwelt fifty years in the world of one master; for he had been born in that house.

"Look at him!" he said, with sorrow and scorn as they conveyed Bister towards the bath. "The old stock is dwindling; there's not a hundred and fifty pounds of him."

Tod Loomis flashed back at him: "You was always above going to see him play football. But I've seen him go through a dozen huskies like quicksilver through your fingers. The same on a horse. The grip that rides a bad one is in the head; it ain't in the knees! Don't splash, sir. You've drenched me!"

They ducked Mr. Lindley Bister's shuddering body and protesting mouth under an icy tide of water and drew him forth gain. Two towels in two pairs of hands dried him, and the powerful fingers of McFarland, with a science learned in the training quarters of prizefighters, kneaded, rolled, and stripped the muscles of Bister until his body glowed and his strength showed like tangled wires beneath the skin.

Then into his dinner clothes he went, stamped his feet into his shoes, and knotted his own tie with a steady touch, saying: "Well done, Chance! Tell Gregory to give you something from the cellar. I'm all myself again. How confoundedly cold that water was. B-r-r! Am I in time?"

"Just, sir, if you set back your watch five minutes. Gregory is fixing the big clock."

"The big clock? Gad! Good old Gregory! Am I all right, Chance?"

"I wouldn't walk too slowly, sir; I wouldn't talk a great deal; and I'd be light on the wine at dinner."

"You're a cool one, Chance. But I'll do as you say. Down I go. Listen! The old clock's striking the hour!"

Chance had white hair, sleeked carefully back; and he had a surprisingly young face set upon a neck that thrust out a bit, which gave him an expression partly wise and partly inquisitive. Besides, on his thin lips a smile seemed always about to appear, though it never actually showed itself. Half mocking, and half reverent, he watched his young master pass from the door of the room and down the hall beyond with a light step which tapped on the stairs, and passed out of hearing.

Then McFarland and Loomis and Chance and the other turned and faced one another, shaking their heads and laughing. All save Chance, who rarely permitted himself more than a smile.

"He's rare!" said Loomis. "A thoroughbred from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head."

"The old strain and the true strain!" declared Tim McFarland. "I'd go through hell for him; I would!"

And even Chance was forced to say slowly: "I think he'll do, for a young one." For this reticence about his masters gave Chance much authority among his fellows. But to have heard the four of them talking in the largeness of their hearts, one surely must have thought that they had just parted from a youth who had done some virtuous and noble act. So great was the overflow of kindness among them that now they accepted the jailbird, McFarland, into their society; and all trooped arm in arm down the stairs towards the servants' quarters. But just before they reached the last landing: "My friends!" said Chance.

They turned to him.

"In the servants' hall, to-night, I intend to tell just as much about what has happened this evening as will be necessary for the peace of mind of all concerned. And you'll do well to forget everything except what I am able to remember at that time. Certainly," he added, his pale eye moving slowly across their faces, "it would have been impossible for us to strip Mr. Lindley Bister, duck him in a tub of cold water, rub him down, and dress him. The reasons are two. In the first place that young gentleman never could have needed such attentions from us. In the second place, he never would have permitted such liberties. Do you understand me?"

"Chance," said Tod Loomis, his red face shining with enthusiasm, "damn me if you ain't a man!"

"Ay," said Tim McFarland, "but serving a master like Mr. Lindley, ain't it sure to bring out the best that's in a man?"

The noble spirit that was receiving all this service and adulation in the meantime was tripping lightly down the stairs into the great hall, singing softly an old, old song about a dapple hound and a fox. As he turned at the bottom of the steps on to the shimmering floor, the image of the great clock floated before him, and as he raised his eyes, he heard the last long, mellow chime die out, and the minute hand moved from the hour mark.

At the library door he paused; and two dignified gentlemen rose to greet him.

"Another proof that your watch is fast, Judge," said Colonel Bister. "Lindley is never late!"

CHAPTER III

THERE was a third person in the room—a girl who was introduced as the niece of Judge Postlethwaite; and young Bister was annoyed, for he knew that in these days of prohibition the eye of a young girl is worth the battering glances of twenty mature dames in detecting the presence of that jovial and wicked ghost, King Alcohol. But though the downstairs rooms were warm, his head remained clear; his feet behaved admirably going in to dinner, and he told himself that he would pass the crisis successfully.

Before they left the library: "There! There! There!" said the Judge. "Look at that span of horns, Halcyone. That's the one I told you about. Sixty-eight inches——"

"Sixty-five, pardon me," said Colonel Bister.

"Confound it, Bister. I say the horns shrank after the kill. Always do. Sixty-eight inches when killed. Stand under them. That was the way the brute looked when it come through the brush as silently as a ghost——"

Said the Colonel softly to his grandson: "I have just made you. Postlethwaite wants to marry her to you. Look at her! Young, beautiful, just from school; perfectly in time to be molded to the hand of a Bister. A clean-bred one, boy. A Tiverton, with no shadowy outcrosses. And seven millions in her own right. You lucky young scalawag!"

"Rather an odd name—Halcyone," said Lindley Bister.

"Rather an—why, damn me, Lindley, if you refuse at this fence may you die a pauper!"

They crossed the hall.

"There you are, Judge. Not two minutes past the hour. I told you that you were wrong."

"My dear Colonel, I carry the very finest Swiss movement, and will you tell me what special dispensation has been granted to this antique to keep it from the errors of other clocks?"

"Habit, Whitney. Habit makes clocks, as it makes men. And for more than two hundred years this clock has never been in error. It wouldn't know how to tell a lie."

"Never has stopped, eh?"

"Never, Whitney, never!"

"Do you mean to tell me that for two centuries any piece of machinery will run without being overhauled?"

"Not recorded in the family history, judge. There's no record of the clock having stopped. Here we are. Miss Tiverton there, if you please. Judge, may I have you here?"

Young Bister settled himself before oysters and a glass of wine. The matter of the clock was proceeding vaguely at the head of the table; and he was aware of a covert nod that directed his attention to Miss Tiverton. He had no wish to draw concentrated attention from anyone, least of all from the colonel, on this night. So he discovered, in spite of the faint mist that hindered his vision, that Miss Tiverton wore a dinner gown of tannish lace, and no ornament except a bracelet of broad-faced emeralds. Not a month before, Harry Rendal, pro-

foundly in love, had taken Bister with him for advice to Tiffany's, and there they had priced a bracelet like this; but not half the size. The memory of that price helped to clear the vision of Bister a bit; he flogged himself into conversation.

Yes, she was just from school. It had been rather hard work. But good fun, too; the girls were so fine! Did he know Miss Sterndal, or Miss Charman, or Edith Whaley, perhaps? He did not; he was very sorry. What had she worked hardest at? At music, it appeared. Wagner was just wonderful, of course; but she *loved* Chopin. Did he?

"H-m-m," said Bister. "Know that old song about the dapple hound and the Peterby fox?"

"No. So sorry. Is it a good thing?"

"Good? I'd like to have 'em sing it while I die! Do you hunt?"

"I'm learning to ride."

He looked at her from a height, and across that mighty chasm which separates twenty-three from nineteen. The Colonel, it appeared, was wrong again; he was nearly always wrong. No doubt she was a clean-bred one; he could tell that by the way she was made around the back of the neck—roundly and neatly, you know, and her head had been put on by a master hand. No one who knew horses could fail to know her; but after all, the place for green colts is in the pasture, not on the hunting field.

"I am not a nursery governess," said Bister firmly.

"I beg your pardon," said she.

"Did I speak?" said Bister, reaching for his glass of

wine. In the uncertain distance he thought he saw Gregory shaking his head; what was Gregory up to? At any rate, it didn't matter; and turning to the girl he saw that a smile was on her lips—he studied the effect of it with care. "Did I say something amusing?" he asked her innocently. And she nodded.

"Don't stop smiling," said Bister. "You ought to smile a lot, you know. It makes you look older."

He added hastily: "I shouldn't have said that!"

But she was merely laughing, and all at once he found that he rather liked her. For you can't tell a colt until it gallops, and you can't tell a girl until she laughs. It was plain that this one had been trained wisely and well.

"Look here," said Bister, "you come out and I'll put you up on a thing a baby could handle; I have a Persimmon gelding with a mouth like silk, and when he jumps, it's as soft as blowing foam. What do you say?"

He saw her obedient eyes travel towards Judge Postlethwaite; but the Judge was busy speaking of the proper height of withers for a hunter, so she looked back to Bister. "I'd like to do it, if I may," said she.

It made Bister slump a little in his chair and drum his hard, slender fingers rapidly on the edge of the table.

"Family gone abroad," he asked, "and left Judge Postlethwaite to—teach you to ride?"

"My mother and father are dead."

"Ah, I'm sorry."

"It's all right. You didn't know."

Tears in her eyes, by Jove, and a quiver in the upper lip. Yes, just a baby. Pasture! Years and years of pasture and schooling before she'd do.

"Uncle Whitney is my guardian—and—everything to me!"

He searched hastily through his mind; there seemed to be sundry misty nooks and corners that were hard to investigate. But finally he could say by way of consolation:

"The judge can keep on a horse; unless the work gets rough." And he reached for his glass again, again aware of a shaken head in the foggy distance.

Presently he was aware that time had been passing; the girl had been talking—for the murmur of her voice was soft and sweet in his memory, somewhere—and they were at fruit and nuts.

"Lindley," said the judge, "what are you and Halcyone talking about so busily?"

He reached back into his mental record of that conversation, and his hand fell at a familiar place.

"I was asking her if she knew the old song about the dapple hound and the Peterby fox."

"A hunting song, Lindley. I have it somewhere in my mind."

"Then bring it out, sir, won't you? I'm keen to know it. Only have the first few words."

"If I had a start at it, I might remember."

That was enough invitation, and Bister, tilting back his head, sang in a rather husky baritone, most unnecessarily loud:

"Go down, go down, go down through the whin, ye!
Down, down to Peterby spinney,

For there they've found. Do ye hear him tell?
It's Dapple, Dapple, as true as a bell!
And his——"

"I lose the thing there," said Bister.

And suddenly the room sounded very still around him; Gregory was a statue; the ticking of the great clock in the hall walked stealthily towards him; and then he was aware of the fierce, bright eye of the colonel fixed upon him.

"You seem in voice, sir," said the colonel coldly. "Positively voice for a concert—or a hunting field, I'd say!"

It was odd that they should take it so queerly. A bit of wine might bring him the explanation, and reaching for his glass—somehow he missed the stem—only the tip of his finger hit it and it spun sideways, crashed, and tossed a crimson shower over the white shirt-front of Judge Postlethwaite.

Surely the devil had nudged that guilty hand of his!

He was on his feet, dabbing at the judge with a napkin.

"Don't understand!" murmured Bister. "Devilishly shorry—sorry, I mean. Eshtremely unfort'nate——"

"Sir!" rang the voice of the colonel, "How does it happen that you are at my table in this condition? Will you retire to your room? Gregory!"

The face of Gregory seemed to Bister whiter than the spinning white lights on the table, but the hand of Gregory on his arm was a hand as steady as iron, guiding him through the wavering doorway, and up the ridiculous confusion of the stairs into a dimly familiar chamber.

Voices sounded, whispering, frightened; footsteps ran

hastily towards him; many hands received him. Then many exclamations. Subdued curses.

"What will the colonel say?"

"Your fault, McFarland. You're somewhere at the bottom of this!"

"I swear to God, and honor bright, I didn't——"

"Stand away."

"Open the windows."

Bister sat on the edge of his bed.

"What's all the trouble about?" he asked. "Don't be rough with McFarland. Here, Tim. You're all right. Gregory! Put up Tim. Where the devil is Gregory?"

"For God's sake, don't call, sir. The colonel's crazy mad already!"

"We'll have a song, lads. The only song for singing. Strike in, all of you:

> "Go down, go down, go down through the whin, ye!
> Down, down to the Peterby spinney . . . . . .

"What's next, Chance?"

"A little sleep, sir. You fellows—out of here! Instantly."

A little confusion; then silence, and out of the gathering darkness the quiet voice of Chance: "Not quite sober enough to keep sober. This will be about the end!"

CHAPTER IV

THE momentary silence which follows embarrassing accidents is much more terrible, in a way, than loud bursts of derision, mockery, or scorn. And the politer the company, and the more quickly the dreadful interval of silence is overcome, the more one is aware of the effort used.

A moment after Bister had left the room under the strong-handed conduct of Gregory, the three who remained made a speaking picture of self-control. The colonel was white about the lips; Judge Postlethwaite, though he forced himself to smile, was breathing hard through dilated nostrils; and Halcyone Tiverton looked earnestly at her plate and then about the room in a desperate effort to find something from which she could start conversation in a new direction.

And first of all she saw the long, dark portraits of the Bister ancestors which hung about the room.

"Uncle Whitney," she said, "you were telling me about that famous Sir Walter Bister. Isn't his picture in this room?"

"It's here, Charles, isn't it?" asked the judge.

The colonel paused an instant as though to unlimber the stiff muscles of his lips.

"Yonder," he said rather hoarsely. "Yonder beside the door."

"That stern-looking man in the helmet, I suppose,"

said the girl. "Yes. He looks like a hero. A real man of iron!"

"You're wrong, my dear," said the judge. "The great Sir Walter is the fellow on the farther side of the door. The one with the long yellow curls, and all the lace."

"But he looks much too beautiful to be a hero," said Miss Tiverton. "What a lovely face!"

"He was six feet two or three," said the colonel dryly, "and I believe that he could lift a barrel of ale by himself and drink from the bung. He kept Bister Castle for half an hour in the face of a hundred of Lambert's devils!"

"Uncle Whitney told me something about it. But he didn't know the details," said she, and she smiled on the colonel with such interest that the strings of his proud heart loosened a little.

"They had blown the gats down with their cursed cannon," said Colonel Bister. "And then, as they herded into the narrow passage within, they were met by one man—that one man was Sir Walter Bister! He had fired his last charged pistol. And he broke his sword on one of their morions with the first blow. But as he gave back, he saw an old-fashioned battle axe hanging on the wall. It was rusty, mind you. But there was good steel under the red of the rust. Good, honest, English steel; and a strong arm makes a dull edge sharp. He brushed aside half a dozen points of rapiers and pikes as they charged at him, and then he stepped in and gave them the edge, working like a woodchopper. Splitting skulls and helmets as gay as you please, until he was walking over the dead and driving the living before him."

"So they ran away!" cried the girl.

Colonel Bister smiled sadly on her.

"Cromwell's men didn't run away," said he. "They only knew how to run in one direction, and that was forward—the psalm-singing, hypocritical scoundrels! Machines, not men! As soon die as eat an apple, the villains! However, they were fairly pushed back through the broken gate, and before they could organize another attack, big Sir Walter and his men had heaped a barricade in the breach, and they staved off the Puritans until night."

"How glorious!" cried Miss Tiverton, bringing her hands together. "So they saved the castle!"

"Humph!" said the colonel. "I've seen Bister Castle with my own eyes. There's a little heap of time-blackened stones where the keep used to rise, and here and there you can see the dim traces of the deepest foundation work; but otherwise there's no sign of the great place. No, my dear, it seems that one didn't save castles from the Ironsides. One might postpone doom for a day or two, but that was all. As soon as the dark came, Sir Walter and the last of his men very sensibly slipped away and left Bister Castle to be sacked."

Miss Tiverton turned a little, to examine the great Sir Walter more closely, and in fact, when one looked more closely under the shining curls, one might see that all the oak and iron of the truest manhood was present in that beautiful face.

"He seems so unlike the others," said she, at last.

"There are two strains of Bisters," said the judge, with the freedom of an old family friend in interpreting the

house history. "Chiefly Normans, you know. Robber barons who came in behind that land-grabbing William the Conqueror."

"Come, come!" said Bister, apparently not appreciating this pleasantry. "Barons following their lawful suzerain, Judge!"

"Stuff!" said the judge, waving the idea away. "Rascally adventurers gathered from half the face of Europe, and you know it, Charles! They came to William of Normandy like a staunch pack when they hear an old hound tell. Those Normans were apt to be dark-browed fellows, Hal. Lean-faced, high-nosed, falcon-race. They came over Merry England like a cloud of ravens and fixed their talons on the good things. Well, look at the majority of the pictures. There you have the general type of the Normans. That's the Bister type, too. Dark, lean, active, keen. But of course after they got to England they occasionally would marry a girl of the soil, now and again; the daughter of some lucky thane who wasn't pushed out of all his rightful holdings after the Conquest. What they didn't get by the sword, they got by marriage, those Norman rascals!"

"One moment, Charles. You really are running on a bit. How could they get the Saxon land when the Saxon thane still lived?"

"Because, if they secured even a woman's right to a bit of land, they knew how to get a man's right, also. They were not great scholars, but they knew how to write the proper documents with their swords. Don't deny it, Bister. He's as touchy about those old villains, Hal, as

though they hadn't lived nine centuries ago. As though they were relatives of yesterday! At any rate, the Bisters married enough into the Saxon strain to show a fair face now and again in the line of the true descent. Not often, though. So you see the dark faces and the blue eyes of these Bisters around the wall. And see the dark face and the blue eye of the colonel, for that matter. But Sir Walter showed the other touch. Golden-haired, you see."

Miss Tiverton was rather bored by this long harangue, but she mastered her desire to yawn; she was so pleased that she had brought the conversation out of the deeps of silence following the disgraceful exit of young Bister; and presently they left that unlucky table and went into the living room and settled down around the crackling fire.

The judge seemed to be in astonishingly good humor, and he took his place before the fire to sun himself in its warmth, teetering back and forth from toe to heel until he saw himself at full length in the mirror at the opposite end of the room; it was such a clear image that he could not miss the great pink and purple stain on his shirt front. And suddenly he sat down in a chair where the light was more shadowy and his shoulder was turned to the others.

The colonel, however, had not met with any such check, and his spirits continued to rise.

"There were worlds to conquer, in those old days," said he. "There was something to do then, judge!"

"Tush!" said the judge testily. "There are worlds still. Just as big; bigger!"

"Eh?" murmured Colonel Bister. "Where are they, pray?"

"Why, field of science. Look at wireless; marvelous! Atoms, electrons—wonderful! Breaking down all the old ideas. New mental world. Something to explore forever. Columbus? A mere amateur adventurer compared with a modern scientist."

"He?" said the colonel, controlling his voice with difficulty.

"Exactly, Charles. Exactly. You must not wear one suit of clothes all year round; and you must be prepared to junk your preconceptions, now and then, and fit yourself up with new ideas. Open your mind, Charlie. Open your mind and let the world flow into it!"

This exordium he pronounced with growing warmth and self-content, speaking in part around an excellent Havana which he was lighting. For the judge was one of those men who are raised or lowered chiefly by their own minds and not by exterior influences. Already, on this evening, he had talked himself out of fits of depression on two occasions. And now he had forgotten the wine stain on his shirt.

The colonel, in the meantime, had set his jaw a little.

"The mind is a storehouse of precious documents, Whitney," said he.

"Open the door, therefore, and put something in, from time to time."

"Open the door to every gale of wind, and the old learning soon will be blown out."

"Not if it's of any weight and worth. Gilded lead and gold weigh about the same," said the colonel acidly.

"A chemical test will prove the difference. Invite the chemist in now and then, Charlie, my boy!"

The judge so enjoyed his advantage in this exchange of metaphors that he could not help rocking back in his chair and breaking into laughter. But in so doing his eye unluckily fell again on the broad stain which ruined his otherwise impressive front.

"The great days are ended," said the colonel with the dignified assurance of one who steps upon the sacred ground of old convictions. "Honor and glory need the sword. The sword is sheathed forever in this degenerate century. Poison gas—the chemist's device—has taken its place. And honor and glory become words easily and lightly taken into the mouth; but easily passing away again. We are less than our grandfathers, Whitney. Their grandfathers were better still. And so back to the days when there were whole-men, not the half-men of our time, or the quarter-men of to-morrow. Specialists in electricity or corporation law. A soul no larger than a book or a test tube! No, no! The world degenerates. General Sidney Bister risked his life to get to a kill and died with a smile. Where is there a man to-day who will attempt such a thing?"

"Ten thousand aviators, my dear Charles!"

"Ha, Postlethwaite, will you compare driving a man-made machine with the glory of riding God's noblest creature in the hunt?"

"Rescue your sense of humor, Charles; it's dying, I'm afraid. Will you have a man die for the sake of a fox's brush, as General Sidney Bister did?"

"Wrong, wrong, Postlethwaite! He died for the sake

of a great idea. The hunt trains the finest faculties of man; prepares him, for instance, for war—teaches him to face danger; endure weariness; nerves body and mind."

"How often does cavalry charge machine-gun nests in these days of trenches?"

"Rake the viewpoint of an eagle—not of an earthworm, Whitney. The horse no longer plays a great part in our degenerate wars; but only on the back of a thoroughbred can the spirit take wings and become what God intended man to be—a creature above filthy concerns of the earth. It is the horse, Whitney, the horse which teaches the proud soul to spurn and trample under foot all save glory and bright honor! And I say the men of the old days were of this metal; and to-day we have fallen away from the old standards."

"In one respect we certainly have fallen away."

"You admit it?"

"Our young men have forgotten how to manage their liquor, it appears."

Miss Tiverton started a little. The words were bad enough, but the tone in which they were spoken struck her like a glove in the face.

"The unfortunate incident of this evening," said the colonel, "seems to have stained not only your shirt-front but your mind. I thought you would be above such malice, sir!"

"One expects that a grown man will not act like an——"

"Uncle Whitney! Uncle Whitney, please!"

"Let him speak up, Miss Tiverton. Let your uncle

speak. One never may know some minds unless the dregs of them are stirred up."

"Dregs, Colonel Bister?" said the judge.

"Dregs, sir."

"Extraordinary language!"

"Judge Postlethwaite, there is a moment when forbearance becomes a slavish fault."

"Sir, I agree with you," said the judge, starting up.

"I have endured," broke in the colonel, "while you called my ancestors rascals and villains; but now it seems that you extend your abuse even to the present generaton! It is too much."

"Colonel Bister, I bid you good evening and good bye. Halcyone, we are leaving at once."

"I shall have your car called, sir."

"You are very kind."

Miss Tiverton turned from one to the other, very frightened, and very appealing, but she saw so much resolute darkness in their faces that she gave up her desire to intervene and hurried from the room with her uncle behind at her heels.

Colonel Bister held her coat for her, while the Judge stood by, snapping his fingers and biting his lips. The automobile whirred outside the door, and as it was opened, Halcyone could not help catching the hand of Colonel Bister and saying earnestly: "I'm so sorry. So, so sorry!"

"You are a sweet child, Halcyone," said the colonel.

And so much moisture rushed into his eyes that he made haste to leave the open door and get to his room. There from the window, he watched the tail light of the

judge's machine speed down the road until it was snatched from view around a bend. And as the sputtering of the exhaust died away, the colonel heard something like a ghostly echo of it in Bister Hall.

He listened more intently, and in the distance made out a deep and sonorous snoring; the face of the colonel grew black.

CHAPTER V

When Lindley Bister wakened in the morning, he sat up quickly in his bed and called Chance to him.

"Chance," said he, "I had too much to drink, last night."

"Yes, sir?" said Chance.

"What did I do?"

"You were inclined to sing a bit, sir."

"I remember the beginning of the evening," said Bister. "But the end of it blurs a little. Grows quite dark, in fact. Singing, did you say?"

"At the table, sir."

"The devil!"

He lay back in the bed.

"Go on, Chance!"

"After singing, sir, your hand missed your wine glass, and the wine spilled."

"On Postlethwaite's shirt. I remember, now. I remember! And then?"

"Then you went to bed, sir."

"Blundered out of the room, do you mean, without a word to anyone?"

"Colonel Bister suggested that you should retire. And Gregory helped you up the stairs."

"The Colonel suggested—Gregory helped—it's bad, Chance!"

"Yes, sir."

"How bad?"

"The Colonel wishes to see you, when you find yourself at leisure."

"Did he put it that way?"

"In those words, sir."

"Ah," groaned Bister, "I know what's about to happen. I could paint a picture of it. Is the colonel polite?"

"Extremely, sir!" said the valet with feeling.

"What shall I do, Chance?"

"Have a cold bath and a rubdown, take a cup of coffee, and go to Colonel Bister's study, sir."

This program was followed to the letter, and that supple, wiry body responded so well to the treatment that Bister was in a fine glow as he walked down the hall. He was interrupted by a hurrying servant announcing that Mr. Richard Bunce was calling.

"Tell Mr. Bunce I'm terribly busy."

"He has a new horse that he hopes particularly to show you, Mr. Lindley."

"A new one? I'll step out."

Out he stepped, and found Dick Bunce on a quivering, dancing gray stallion, stockinged with black to the knees and hocks. And the rest was hardly gray, except at a close inspection; it was rather a shimmering white silk.

"Oh, Dick, you scoundrel! Do they come like this in Kentucky?" cried Bister.

"Steady, damn you!" said Bunce, as the gray reached about with snaky speed and tried to take off the leg of his rider at the knee. "No, they don't come like this anywhere. But God happened to drop this colt in Ken-

tucky. That's all. There's nothing else like him. Stand behind him, Lin!"

Bister, obediently passing to the rear, dodged a pair of reaching heels. But presently he groaned with admiration.

"There's something wrong," said Bister.

"What, then?"

"Nothing can be perfect. There's a fly in the ointment somewhere."

"Look some more. I came out from my place in thirty-five minutes, by the road."

"Why by road?"

"He's not made, Lin. There's the fly in the ointment. He hasn't been taught to jump, apparently. And he has the temper of a fiend. But what does that matter?"

"No," said Bister with a sigh. "It's nothing. Did you say thirty-five minutes by the road?"

"Yes. I timed him without cheating. And look at him now! Hardly breathing!"

"What's his name?"

"Mistral."

"That's the wind that blows down the Rhone, isn't it?"

"And he's well named, Lin. He goes like silk."

"Sixteen-two?"

"To a hair."

"God forgive me for envy. I hate you, Dick. I suppose he was given away?"

"Twelve hundred."

"For that?"

"He belonged to an old lady. As a matter of fact, she

was going to destroy the brute; something happened to her son."

"Not killed, eh?"

"I'm afraid so. He's a devil, Lin. The hell in him never stops boiling, so far as I can make out."

"What difference?" demanded Bister, stepping back, and looking at the stallion again with half-closed eyes. "What difference?" he repeated with emotion. "If it were hell under forced draft, I'd go there for the sake of a brute like that!"

"I knew you'd say that, and it brings me to the point. Lin, I've schooled a good many; and we have some good men on our place."

"Of course. Donnelson is one of the best."

"Well, Donnelson doesn't want to touch Mistral, and the rest of the boys are afraid to come within a rod of him. It's a job for me, and plainly, I need help. What do you say?"

"Dick, it would be a privilege to carry water to a horse like that; you can call on me three times a day. When shall I begin?"

"I'm having a special schooling ground rigged for him. It will be ready in three days, I think."

"Can't you work him with the others?"

"No, he thinks he's a tiger and he's ready to eat horse any minute of the day. Look out!"

For Mistral, who had been sidling towards Bister, now whirled and drove out with deadly heels. Only the footwork which Bister had learned from his boxing lessons enabled him to sidestep the lunge and Mistral, as though furious at having missed, began to buck and fight like

the very spirit of evil. He hurled himself into the air until Bister could see the top of the hedge beneath him; he came down stiff-legged, flung himself on the ground backwards, and came up squealing with rage. But young Bunce, a master-horseman, had dipped out of the saddle and back again. Grim-faced he sat the saddle while Mistral flashed here and there and finally bolted down the drive and up the road beyond as though trusting to the terrific wind of his gallop to blow the man from his back.

Bister, swinging into the branches of the nearest tree, watched the great horse go; and he swayed back and forth in his place like a music lover. Still half drunk with the rhythm of that mighty gallop, he dropped to the ground again and stood in a bright shower of autumn leaves, regarding them not at all; for in the eye of his mind he still saw the light rippling on haunch and shoulder of the flying Mistral.

What is the bewildering joy and grief of the youth who sees the lady of his dreams and finds her wedded to another? Such was the sweetness and the pain in the heart of Bister, but when he opened his eyes again, he was recalled to himself sharply by a vision as grim as a ghost at the casement of an ancient castle; for at the study window stood Colonel Bister, half lost in the shadows of the room.

He hurried in at once, but when he reached the study door, he was forced to pause. He had been in that sanctum only twice before—once when he departed from Bister Hall for college to win glory on the football field and in the law school afterwards—once again when he

had returned with a little taste of the one, but without a scruple of the other. He felt that the Colonel was surrounded by a sufficient dignity in well-nigh any environment, but in his study with the yellow-edged manuscript of his memoirs strewn before him, he was divorced from the present and sat in the past as securely as a picture in an old book. So to young Bister that door was like the door of a tomb, and a double shadow fell upon his heart as he crossed the threshold on this day.

Yet he gained more heart the moment he was inside and had closed the door softly behind him, for the colonel sat in front of a triple window that opened on the beauty of the autumn woodland, folded over hill and valley in crimson, gold, or orange, now breathed upon and empurpled by the morning mist. The very soul of a hermit would have been called out to happiness by such a picture, but then Bister took note that the colonel was turned from this scene and made a black silhouette against the glory.

CHAPTER VI

"A WELL-MANNERED horse, that," said the colonel. "It looked like the Prince Regent strain, to me. By the manners and by the color, too."

"Prince Regent!" cried Bister. "The Prince Regent strain! You're right, sir. By heavens, that's what it is. I thought that there was a familiar look about the head—something in the eyes and the flare of the nostrils. A hundred to one, it's the Prince again!"

"From your manner, I gather that you'd give a good deal for that horse of Bunce's."

"My heart!" said Bister passionately. "I'd give my heart without a moment's hesitation."

"Ah? Ah?" commented the Colonel. "Well, perhaps he may be on the market again before long. He has killed one master before this; and by the way he went after Richard Bunce, I should say that it may not be long before there's another death to his credit. Would you still want him after that?"

"More than ever," said Bister, with enthusiasm giving a stir to his voice.

As he spoke he became more closely aware of the eye of the colonel, which was fixed upon him coldly, steadily, with a sort of implacable calculation.

"You wouldn't use this gray horse—what is its name?"

"Mistral, sir."

"You wouldn't use Mistral as an object lesson, I presume?"

"No, I'd hunt foxes with him. Why, those legs of his would simply walk across country that would kill off most horses."

"How we differ!" said the colonel, with a smile that had no kindness in it. "How extraordinarily we differ! You may be interested to know what I would do with a horse that had killed two masters?"

"Yes?"

"I should have the brute led out into the woods and shot, Lindley, the moment that it was brought on to my place! You understand?"

"I hear what you say."

"But Richard Bunce is an old college friend, a football player on your team; and yet if this savage beast killed him, you could use it to hunt foxes!"

Young Bister was silent, and his glance wandered uneasily to the rows of hunting trophies along the walls, back to the dull gleam of the mahogany desk behind which the colonel sat, and finally to the sheaf of papers before his grandfather. On odd mornings—that is to say, when there was no hunting—the colonel had been working at his memoirs during the past ten years. Now Colonel Bister pushed the pile away from him as though to dismiss the past and give the present more elbow room.

He motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, Lindley."

"Before I sit down, I have an apology to offer for my disgraceful condition of last night," said Bister.

The eye of the colonel—as blue and bright as that of his grandson—glittered a little as he leaned forward.

"Tell me, Lindley. Do you really feel that it was disgraceful?"

At this appeal to his honest opinion, Bister raised his head and reflected.

"Yes," he said, "disgraceful. Or at least, out of place. I was frightfully out of place."

"That is illuminating," said the older man, "and now I think that we may get to the bottom of things. I have agreed, always, with the poet who says: 'To your own self be true.' If a man is true to himself—if he is hewing to the line—then may not the chips fall where they will, unregarded?"

"One hardly wants to knock chips in the face of a young girl and two—elderly gentlemen, sir."

"In a word, Lindley, you wanted to be polite. You didn't want to hurt the feelings of anyone."

"Certainly not, sir."

"Purposely, you never would have interfered with my friendly relations with Judge Postlethwaite, or interrupted the affection of a lifetime."

"By gad, sir, don't tell me——"

The colonel raised his slender hand.

"Nothing is more dangerous than generalization," said he. "With the large pink stain on his shirtfront, the judge was tempted into generalizations concerning the Bisters. The evening ended at an early hour!"

"I'll ride over to his place this morning!" exclaimed Bister. "I'll offer him my heartfelt apologies!"

"No!" cried the colonel. "You will not approach him.

You will never set foot across his threshold without my express permission, and may——"

He stopped himself with an effort; his color had risen and his breathing grown hard. He paused until he had recovered himself.

"The young lady," said the colonel, "has passed out of your life."

"Was she catty about it, too?"

"Drunkenness," said the colonel, "seemed a novelty to her. Her education, perhaps, has not been so broad as that of other young women with whom you are acquainted, I have no doubt."

"She seemed rather old-fashioned," said Bister, choosing to overlook part of this speech.

"Seven million dollars is never old-fashioned," said the colonel abruptly, "as long as the money is clean."

"How *did* Tiverton make his money?"

"Coal, I believe," said the colonel, and bit his lip. "However, I pass over the lost fortune. It was equivalent to a principality, a dukedom. You have seen fit to throw it away; but let us pass on——"

"But, sir, you must admit that things hadn't gone very far. One can't say that she would have had me."

"The girl is well-bred," declared the colonel. "She is trained; I trust that she has some commonsense; and I believe that a Tiverton would think twice before refusing a Bister. However, I wish to pass over these points; because, as I know, you did not purposely insult us. It was simply that we had you a little too freshly from the hands of your other friends, one of whom you brought home with you. I refer to the thief, Tim McFarland."

"Not a thief!" exclaimed Bister.

"A tried, convicted, and sentenced thief, now fresh from prison."

"Let me tell you the details about that. Tim had gone to young Jackson to borrow his car; Jackson was not home and Tim took the car anyway. He would have returned it in the morning, but before morning he was arrested, and——"

"Arrested for carrying liquor in the machine, I believe?"

"Yes, I believe so. To our house, perhaps; we've used lots of Tim's stuff, you know. The car was confiscated, and Jackson was not man enough to stand the loss without howling. So poor Tim went up the river as a thief."

"A cogent bit of reasoning and explanation," said the colonel. "I long ago suspected that you had talents for the law, my boy. But let me come back to an earlier point which I have been trying to make for some time. Your feeling about the affair of last night is that you were out of place, simply."

He paused, and Bister thrust out his chin a little.

"If you wish to state it so bluntly—yes, that is my feeling."

"If you had been in another place——?"

"I might have been perfectly comfortable."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"In other words, you were being true to yourself; but yourself needs audiences of various kinds, it seems. What is appropriate to the realization of yourself is applauded by one society, and disgusting to another?"

Bister was silent; his eyes were wonderfully blue and bright.

"Do you know that you are like a man who goes through the world peddling goods of various kinds? In one pocket he carries knives, and in the other knitting needles. But now and then he is apt to make a mistake. His knitting needles may be laughed at at one door; and his knives may cause a fainting spell at another. And so it was last night. You took out the wrong self—and exhibited it—in some detail!"

The colonel was selecting his words with some care; and since Bister flinched no more than a rock, the colonel wielded the lash with a more vigorous and judicious hand.

"We must pass on from this phase of the matter," said the head of the house. "We must pass on to broader considerations, for I don't want to speak of last night, only; but of your whole life, Lindley."

"Very well, sir."

Said the colonel: "This world in which we have been placed"—here he glanced solemnly upwards—"this wonderful and beautiful world in which we have been placed, has been given into the hands of people of two kinds. The one are producers; the others are non-producers. Do you follow me?"

"Producers of what, sir? Money?"

"Producers of what?" said the colonel, looking a bit blank. "Why, producers of everything—the chair you sit in, the book you read, the house that covers you!"

"I understand you, then."

"Their responsibility is great; their work is important," said the colonel, "but it cannot be all-important.

Against them cannot be balanced the class of detestable idlers, thieves, vagabonds, or all the rottenness of a society which has no concern except to amuse itself. But as a counterpoise to the producers, in all countries which can be called great, there always has been and ever must be a class necessarily small which is ready to prize honor more than cash, and to follow bright glory like a star!"

The colonel paused again, with a heaving breast. Finally he was able to say, but abruptly: "To what class do you claim to ally yourself, Lindley?"

"I don't know," said the grandson. "I somehow thought that it might be enough for a man to be a Bister, you know. But if one had to go into business—why, it might be a great game."

"Business? I presume you mean law or medicine or divinity?"

"No. For instance, Marston wanted me to go in with him. He thought he could use me."

"For what?"

"He has an advertising business."

"Advertising?" said the colonel. "Advertising?"

He lowered himself carefully into the chair from which he had half started.

"Our viewpoints seem to diverge," he said slowly. "Even our understanding of business cannot be the same."

"Why," said Bister, "law is dry, medicine is damned hard work, and there isn't much divinity in me."

"Perhaps not," replied the colonel. "No, perhaps not. And your goal in life, then, is to be a Bister. I do not hesitate to say that would be enough. But still there are various interpretations of the proper life for a Bister, it

seems. My own viewpoint may be a narrow one. I have felt that my life would be closed in happiness if I could raise you, my boy, to be brave, gentle, pure of heart, and noble of soul—a man of such a fashion that your country in dull times of peace might never know of you, but in a day of need she would find you like a strong right hand.

"That was my viewpoint, and my hope. But the hope is too narrow for it, it appears. I should enlarge my mind. I should convert Bister Hall, at times, into a wayside tavern. I should fill its rooms with smugglers, ruffians, men of the soil, outcasts from even the lowest society. I should do these things if I were to approach your own broadness of mind. But I find that I cannot. Old limitations still confine me. I regret my narrowness. I grieve that I cannot be like you."

They were on their feet.

"What am I to do?" asked Bister. "Fall on my knees and beg forgiveness or simply promise a thorough reform?"

"Do you take that line with me, Lindley?"

"What line do you expect from a ruffian, an outcast from the lowest society?"

The colonel, purple with emotion, walked back and forth across the room before he could speak again.

"You bring home your boon companions—your jailbird friends—and—I have given orders that McFarland be dismissed at once!"

"Unfortunately, you will have to recall those orders."

"*Have* to, young man? *Have* to?"

"Yes, I have given McFarland my word that we'll find a place for him here."

From purple, the colonel had turned white; he was trembling and resting the knuckles of one hand on the desk.

"I understand you," he said at last in a stifled voice. "I shall keep—McFarland."

"Thank you."

"It is nothing. And I have no more to say."

Lindley Bister bowed, but as he reached the door the colonel spoke again:

"One moment."

"Yes, sir."

"There is another thing which you ought to understand. I have written to your cousin—to John Bister Lynmouth. I have invited him to come down here for a long visit."

"I'm to compete with Jack in virtue—is that it?" asked Bister. "And Bister Hall goes to the winner?"

To this there was no answer. They stared at each other fixedly and coldly.

"Is that all, sir?"

"Quite."

So Bister walked from the study.

CHAPTER VII

EVERY human soul connected with Bister Hall was waiting breathlessly to learn the outcome of that meeting between the colonel and his heir. They saw Lindley Bister come out with a face of stone and go to his room; they saw the colonel follow almost at once, and presently come down and demand Hastings, his strongest and fiercest mount.

"Not lifted a feather for three weeks, sir," said Tod Loomis.

"Hastings, Loomis, at once," said the stern colonel, and the great black horse was brought out, with two undergrooms dangling from his reins. Then up went the colonel, and putting Hastings at the tallest hedge, he sailed away across country.

"It's a break. A clean break," said Tod Loomis, and started for the house to make sure. Chance would be able to guess nearer than any other person.

Chance was whiter than either of his masters. The faint smile was still upon his lips, but it was a smile of sheerest agony, now, without the slightest mockery or mirth attached; he would not say a word but turned his sick face from his questioners.

But that was simply the telling of a story without words, and presently the tidings were everywhere. The chambermaids had it; the cook's apprentice listened agape while the chef and Gregory spoke together with funereal,

soft voices; the porters and the gardeners stood in guilty consultation; the smallest exercise boy at the stables was big-eyed with the word, and at the kennel the very dogs stopped their fighting and curiously eyed their keepers; so the tidings crossed the truck garden and reached the farms. In the meantime, Lindley Bister, in his room, changed to riding togs, examined himself in the mirror, rubbed some color into his face, and took a nip of brandy to raise his spirits a shade.

He came out behind the house in time to see Tim McFarland sneaking off towards the road, and he called Tim back sharply. Tim explained in a troubled voice that he understood that he wouldn't be needed at Bister Hall.

"You stay here," said Bister. "There was a mistake; but it's put right now. Tell Loomis to put you to work. You can put in your time on my string."

"If I was to make any trouble——" began Tim faintly.

"There's no danger of trouble," said Bister, and strode on to the stables. He entered them, whistling, and: "What needs a bit of work, Tod?" said he, "I'm going to raise a breeze across country, for a bit."

"There's Barbarian, sir. He could do with a gallop."

"I don't want to use spurs," said Bister. "I'm lazy, to-day. How's Miss Muffet?"

"Ready to break her neck rather than jump, the she-devil!"

"I'll try her for a while."

"Not for another fortnight, at least, sir."

"Fortnight? No, now! I'll take her now."

He turned his back and strolled about until Miss Muffet was brought out—a big bay, ugly-headed, but

with legs that had their uses across that rough country. She tried to whirl and knock down her grooms. She was spinning like a top when Bister leaped into the saddle and straightened her out with a whip stroke that welted her shoulder. Straight at the hedge which the colonel had flown not long before he drove the mare. She refused with ugly abruptness which nevertheless did not unseat him; around in a circle he took her and with a shout lifted her over.

The grooms watched her go, and Tod Loomis said gravely: "We'll have work to do on Hastings and Miss Muffet when they come in; or else a Bister to follow to the churchyard to-morrow."

"Is it true that Mister Lindley is gunna leave?" asked a round-eyed stable boy.

"What sort of talk are you paddling around out here, you blatherskites?" cried Loomis. "Get back to your work, all of you. And remember that blood's a damn sight thicker than water any day of the year. Look at him dipping across country like a sea gull over waves! Miss Muffet never worked like that before!"

Never, indeed, for Bister was riding her in a cold fury, like an avenger on a blood trail. Five miles of blistering work took the rebellion out of her, but just when Bister made sure that she was comfortably in his hand, she shied at the sight of a woman galloping down the road—shied in the very act of taking a wire fence, and flung Bister into the barbs.

Miss Muffet galloped back for home, leaving her master dangling in the barbs. He heard a scream, a rattle of

hoofs, and then a girl's voice crying: "Are you hurt, Mr. Bister?"

There was sound of tearing cloth, and then Bister got through and stood up on the far side of the fence; he found Halcyone Tiverton swinging down from the saddle.

"Hello," said Bister. "No, these breeches are done in, but I'm not scratched. See her going home, the witch! The feed box is the only compass that she can follow."

"It looked a terrible thing, from a distance," said she, panting with excitement. "I thought that you'd be torn to bits in the barbs!"

He was looking away from her after Miss Muffet; the horse had paused on the way to pick at some temptingly long grass.

"Look here, can that thing go?" asked Bister, hooking his thumb at Miss Tiverton's gelding.

"*I* think so," said she. "I've never let him out."

"Let me borrow him to catch that nag of mine, will you?"

"But he has a side saddle, you see."

"That's nothing."

Into the side saddle he hopped, galloped down to the side of a screening hedge, and then cut away down a hollow. Miss Muffet was unaware of danger until it burst upon her, then she made a wild struggle for freedom, but before she could get well under way, a hand of iron had caught the flying reins. She was drawn to a halt, and presently Bister was galloping back in his own proper saddle. He put the mare over the wire fence, with

the gelding jumping with empty stirrups beside her; then, dexterously, he brought both horses to a halt before the girl and dismounted.

"You've done me a good turn," said he. "It would have been too bad for me to let the mare get back to the stable with an empty saddle to worry the lads there; especially as I think they guessed I was riding more for spite than for fun."

"Spite?" said the girl, opening her eyes at him in a way she had.

"Just had a brush with my grandfather; over last night, you know. Was I very bad?"

"I don't know," said she. "Were you?"

"I see you're not too kind."

"What have I done?"

"It's more comfortable to be damned than to be laughed at. But I don't really mind; I offer you my apology formally for last night."

"You don't need to; and Uncle Whitney was silly to be so cut up. One would think that it was his only shirt."

"Those older people like to be dignified," said Bister, "and one can't be very dignified in a dirty shirt, you know. By Jove, I think you're laughing with me, now!"

"Of course," said she.

"I like you," said Bister, "a lot. How old are you, Halcyone?"

"I'm nineteen. But I'll get older, you know."

"Of course you will," he agreed thoughtfully. "Look here, you're always smiling, aren't you? And thinking, too, it seems."

"Oh, no. I've finished that. When I closed the last textbook."

"H-m-m," said Bister, "you'll take a lot of knowing, I suppose, and the judge won't want me about until he gets over his mad. Does he say I'm good for nothing?"

"I can't quote him."

"Is it as bad as that? I'm not a good-for-nothing, Halcyone. Of course I drink. Partly for fun and partly on principle. Do you mind that a lot?"

"Well," said she, "one can't expect you to act like a nursery governess."

The words seemed oddly familiar to Bister. He reflected on them for a moment and then, since he could not quite remember: "You want to get on, I see; let me give you a hand up. There you are. Sit straight, Halcyone; if you sag like that you can't take a pull, and every horse isn't a baby, like that one. Keep your stomach in, and your chin out."

"You want me to look like a soldier, I see!"

"No, but you always should sit as if you were proud of your horse, even if it's a nag. That's something like. You'd be as pretty as the very devil on a good horse."

"Thank you, Lindley. Will you pick one out for me?"

"I have already. Good bye, Halcyone. Stomach in! Good bye!"

CHAPTER VIII

BACK to Bister Hall went he, almost too busy rating Miss Muffet over the hedges and fences to give a chance to his gloomy thoughts to possess his mind. When he got back to the hall, he met a scampering groom:

"Take this mare and rub her down—hello! Come back here!"

The boy darted past him in the direction of the house, never heeding. A second flashed out of the stable, but Bister collared him as he flew.

"What the devil is up?"

"The colonel, sir. He's had a bad fall——"

"Where is he?" cried Bister, changing color.

"They've carried him into the house——"

"*Carried* him!" Bister waited to hear no more, but gave Miss Muffet a flying start towards the house. He was out of the saddle and running for the rear entrance before she had stopped galloping, and then up the stairs, bounding, and down the hall, and to the door of his grandfather's room, from which came a hum of subdued voices.

Numb with fear, he looked in at a motionless form on the bed, the head of the colonel swathed in a great white cloth.

"Chance!" gasped Bister. "It's not the end of his riding! It's not the last of the colonel, for God's sake!"

Chance was ever slow in his speech, and now he hesi-

tated long enough to let Bister make up his mind for himself. He flung himself on his knees beside the bed and said bitterly: "I've done this, Chance. It's my fault. I've driven him to it with the most damned ingratitude!"

But here the hand of the supposed dead man rose and pushed the white bandage from his face.

"Look here, Lindley," said the colonel, "you might wait till I'm dead before you start a wake for me."

"You're not done in!" cried Bister, gripping one of the colonel's hands in both of his. "The fools with their yammering and their whispering about had me convinced that—well, I guessed wrong, thank God!"

Chance, with a withering look, swept the other servants before him and left the room with a soft step.

"I think you're glad," said the old man, his keen eyes burning into those of his grandson. "I think you're glad, Lindley."

"Could you doubt it? Ay, but you could, sir. I talked to you like a scoundrelly, impertinent ingrate this morning; and I'm on my knees now to beg you to forgive me!"

"Hush, Lindley. Hush, boy," said the colonel, gathering his brows in a tremendous frown. "For folly I was not half a step behind you this morning. And I got my reward. Hastings blundered like a clumsy yearling; the fall twisted my right leg nearly off my body, and I think I'm out of the cream of the hunting!"

"Are you in pain, now?"

"Not a whit. I feel nothing while you are with me, Lin. But we must be more tender of one another. There

is a great bridge of years between us, and every day we must cross and recross it carefully."

Bister snatched himself from his knees and hurried to the window where he stood for a moment, breathing hard.

"I'll never forget!" he declared solemnly.

"No," said the colonel. "Don't forget, my boy. I'm old. Perhaps I'm walking back into childishness and you must make allowances for that and for the infernal Bister temper. I've let it run away with me before, and I'll let it run away again, perhaps. Last night it brought my friendship with the judge on a reef. It wrecked us. Although that was not entirely my fault."

"No, it was mine," replied Bister eagerly, "and I'll find a way to undo that mischief. I'll go to the judge——"

"Not, by the eternal God! I'll see him damned before we make a step. He wronged and insulted me in my own house——"

"I'd messed him up with wine; he was simply out of temper——"

"Confound him, was he himself never young? Haven't I seen him in his cups when the pair of us were youngsters? No, he's become an intolerant, bigoted bore. I want no more of him. Everything is at an end between us. If he came to me on his knees, Lin, by God I'd close the door in his face!"

He changed his tone suddenly.

"What's happened to your clothes, my boy? And isn't that blood? By heavens, it is, and you are injured and caring for me while you yourself are—Chance! Chance!"

"It's nothing," protested Bister. "The blundering idiot, Miss Muffet, refused and spun me into a wire

fence. The barbs did this. Tore the cloth, but hardly scratched the skin."

"Barbed wire? The invention of the devil! It must have been Crockett's place."

"Yes, it was."

"I'm going to drive that villain out of the country. I've threatened to do it before, and now I'll squeeze him out of house and home—him and his man-traps! Barbed wire!"

He closed his eyes suddenly and shook his head.

"Think of it, Lin. All in one morning the two of us so close to going out into the dark and leaving the Bister name a blank forever. Ah, my lad, we must be close and true to one another! The devil take it, that reminds me of Jack Lynmouth; he'll be here this evening."

"I'll meet him at the train."

"Do that, Lin. Do that, my boy. In my letter to him, I may have phrased myself rather urgently, and when he comes, there must be some excuse. I can let him know that I feel the two branches of the family should be drawn closer together, eh?"

"And so they should," said Bister. "After all, he's the grandson of your sister. Blood has to tell, sir, or else what's the good of living?"

"Right—right—right!" sighed the colonel, smiling faintly at Bister. "You're always right in the pinch, my dear Lindley. In the tight places, you don't miss. Well, we'll have the boy down here and make him at home. After you, he's the next heir. Good God, Lin, you must take close care of yourself. I'll sell Miss Muffet. Or give her away, the treacherous, thick-headed fool!"

"People might think we're afraid of her, sir."

"Eh? Well, they might. However, don't ride her more than once in a month. I'll have Loomis on the mat for letting one of your string get in such shape."

"Loomis warned me."

"What good is a warning? He shouldn't have let you take the mare! I'll let Loomis go. I'll give him a month and send him off. The woods are full of good grooms."

"He has a rare touch—poor old Loomis. I think of how he's brought on Barbarian. However, the Philip Osbornes will be glad to get him. They've been after him before."

"Have they?" exclaimed the colonel, with heat. "The underhanded, jealous—well, they'll not get him. I'll dress the fellow down, but I'll keep him."

"He's honest as the day is long," said Bister, "and he knows horses."

"I made him myself," declared the colonel warmly. "There's not a better lad in the country than Tod Loomis, and he shall be training horses for your grandson, Lin, if God is willing!"

"Ay," said Bister, smiling, "that's my hope about him."

There was a knock at the door, at this point, and then the announcement of a note just brought over from Judge Postlethwaite.

"Give it to me—quick!" said the colonel.

He thrust himself up on one elbow and his hands trembled as he tore the envelope. He read aloud with a stammering haste:

"Dear Charlie,

Lindley was a young fool, last night, and I'm afraid that we were two old ones. Let's erase that ugly blot from our memory. In fact, I've already forgotten everything except that I am your best and oldest friend.

WHITNEY POSTLETHWAITE."

The colonel crumbled the paper in his hand and lay back on the pillow with a frown.

"It's too late," said he. "There is a certain reverence due from man to man, and Postlethwaite has forgotten it. But I shall not forget. Not on my own account. I detest a foolish pride, Lindley. By heavens, I scorn and detest it. I'm the least proud man in the world; willing to go ten paces if the other man will go one. But one owes a duty to society in the preservation of manners, and when the bounds are overstepped a penalty must be paid. Do you hear me, Lindley?"

"Yes, sir. But perhaps you were almost as hot with the judge as he was with you."

"I? Hot? I'm rarely hot. No, I remember every word I said to him. I was firm. Yes, I was firm, but never discourteous. Wouldn't retract a syllable that I said to him. Not an infernal word. Don't try to persuade me."

"No, sir; but the judge is a very old friend."

"Don't try to argue with me, Lindley. I can see what is right and what is wrong. A Bister is a Bister; God who made us gentlemen will preserve our gentility. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never forget it. Realize that you have a duty to yourself—a certain sacred dignity to maintain, and when it is violated, stand upon your rights as a Bister. You see what has happened in this case. You would have rushed over to Postlethwaite with an apology, but by waiting, I have forced him to take the first step!"

"That's a good deal," declared Bister, "because the judge is as proud a man as there is in the county."

"Or the world, Lindley. He comes of an old stock and he has a reason for his pride. But you see that he has taken the first step, hasn't he?"

"Unquestionably, sir."

"An admission that he was in the wrong. Don't dispute. Admit it at once!"

He smoothed the paper with tender care.

"There's a shake in his handwriting, Lindley. Years are telling on the judge. Telling sadly."

"He can hunt, still."

"After a fashion. Only after a fashion. Now run along and send in Chance. Wait one moment, Lin."

"Yes, sir?"

"You might drop over to the house of the judge and let him know why I'm not calling in answer to his note. And tell him—ah!—tell him that he and I could have lunch together in my room—if he doesn't mind humoring an invalid!"

CHAPTER IX

When Bister stepped into his roadster to meet the train which brought down young Lynmouth, that night, he was thoroughly happy, for he knew that he had passed a serious crisis on this day. He had established an *entente cordiale* with his grandfather on so firm a basis that he felt it would withstand the shocks of years, and the security which this gave him made him shoot the long machine down the driveway a little more swiftly than usual. He skidded out on to the open road, throwing a dust cloud into the face of a frightened horse and carter, and then straightened away towards the station, ten miles away.

"Twelve minutes, if you hurry," Bister used to say.

And usually he hurried. His brakes screamed at every corner, and the screech of the skidding wheels told of rubber burned away by the handful.

"What happens to your tires?" his grandfather often asked.

"Just wear out," Bister would say. "You can't have your cake and eat it, you know."

Maxims are so often used against one that it's delightful to be able to bring one over on the right side of the fence.

It was a grand night, the air sweet with an autumn chill, and the sky crowded with such bright hosts that Bister ran with sidelights only. He knew the road like

a book, but after all, one cannot know what will be on the road, and as he dashed about a corner which was made blind by a tall hedge, there has a scream and flurry before him. He thought for an instant that he had caught a woman with his right fender; no, it was only her flying cloak. Four-wheel brakes stopped him in a length or two, with a shriek; and he saw a man hurrying ahead of two girls.

"Are you drivin' on a race track, you fool?" shouted the escort.

"Bill! Bill!" cried one of the pair behind. "It's Mr. Lindley Bister!"

Bill stopped short and unfurled his ponderous hands.

"Sorry, sir," said he. "But you did give us a scare."

"I'm always forgetting my horn," admitted Bister. "Where are the three of you going?"

"You can see the lights yonder, sir. There's a dance in the Whipple barn."

"Hop in," said Bister. "I'll take you there. Open up the jigger seats, will you?"

Bill obediently drew up the extra seats, and with giggles of excitement the party climbed in. . . . "You get in front with Mr. Bister. Sally and me'll sit back here. Let her go, Mr. Bister. Just as if you were alone, sir!"

How fast will eight cylinders in a line pick up a car from a standing start? The next curve was not far ahead, but they shot about it with enough speed to bring a delighted squeal from the passengers.

"*Ain't* this the life?" crowed Bill.

Bister glanced at the girl beside him and saw a classic profile whose delicacy even the starlight showed. She

was holdng on hard, but her head was high and her lips parted in terror and joy.

"And who are you?" said Bister.

"I've got two names," she replied, "but out here I'm called—oh!—how wonderful!"

(They had passed a Ford with a blast of the horn and a rattle of the opened exhaust.)

"Out here I'm Kitty Divine."

"Are you old Mike Divine's little girl?"

"I'm not so little, you know!"

"And what's your other name, Kitty?"

"Oh, it's just a business name. See?"

"What sort of business?"

"Movies."

"Humph!" said Bister. "And what do the movies call you?"

"Sylvia La Roche."

"Was that wished on you?"

"I picked it out all by myself."

"We're here. Is your young man waiting for you, Kitty?"

"No. I didn't know I was going to be home this evening. But poor old Bill and Sally let me tag along."

The party climbed out with gasps and chuckles. It was a great ride, they declared. They would pay another scare to have such another whirl. Bister was conconsulting his watch. It was twenty minutes to train time, and he was more than halfway.

"Look here, Kitty; let me have the first dance, will you?"

"Will I? You bet I will. The girls will nearly choke, if they see me dancing with you!"

Sweet strains of a tango floated through the open, double doors, and they entered a great room where three hundred tons of loose hay could be stored when the Whipples were running their stables. It was empty, now. Bunting hung from the rafters where crowds of electric lights had been strung, and the floor gave back the radiance in shimmering reflections. For the wood had been polished by long friction with masses of hay, and a little wax rubbed in had turned it to glass.

"Oh!" said Kitty Divine, as they slipped into the dance. "It's skating not dancing! How'll we manage the tricky tango turns and stops?"

"Are you afraid?"

"Not a bit! You lead, and I'll follow—woof!"

Here a sliding pair had crashed into them; but Kitty recovered at once and nodded cheerfully: "Hello, Martha, who's you fat friend?"

The fat man turned pink.

"The big ham!" said Kitty fiercely, looking up to Bister. "Do you like to tango?"

"No," said Bister, "I don't like to think when I dance."

"Me neither," said Kitty. "It's like starting music again—so much counting! Here's a substitute that Mr. Isaacstein showed me. Look! You drag out a couple of slow ones; then a patter step like this; then you hesitate, and over again—and any little old thing you think of on the side. That's it. Jiminy, Mr. Lindley, you ought to be on the stage."

"Who's Isaacstein?"

"I don't want to talk. Jus' dance! Oh! If they see you clap, they'll be sure to play it again. Thank you. Here we go! We just fit, dancing, don't you think? Won't dad nearly die when he knows I've danced with Lindley Bister!"

"This Isaacstein, Kitty?"

"He's the gentleman with the coin behind the producer I'm working for. You ought to see him—so fat!—and flat-footed. But he loves to dance and he's got wonderful ideas—and diamonds! And everything! You wouldn't believe how kind he is to me!"

"Humph!" said Bister. "Didn't he help you find that stage name?"

"Just a little bit. You know how it is. There's a million Kittys; but not so many Sylvias. Sounds good, too. Then La Roche, that's Italian or French or something. Sort of different, you know. Sylvia La Roche! Mr. Isaacstein says it will pack them in, if I can learn how to act kind of foreign."

"And how do you do that?"

"It isn't so hard. You just act a bit slinky and slimpy."

"Oh," said Bister.

"And you look at a man like this—sidewise, sort of, and smiling just a tiny bit, with your head back."

"Ah," said Bister, "I begin to understand!"

"It's just a knack," said Sylvia La Roche, "but some of the girls can't get it. You'd laugh to see them! They've stopped again! Won't you clap once more, Mr. Bister? See, they're watching what you do! And here we go again! See that pair trying to steal our stuff!"

"What's your part in the picture, Kitty?"

"I do a double. First I wear a blond wig and I'm the girl that he left behind him at the farm, you know. Then without the wig I'm one of the vamps. I drink pink water and look dangerous. 'He learned about women from her,' is the caption. Mr. Isaacstein, he writes all the captions, nearly. I asked him how he got them. He says they just come. I guess he's got a sort of a genius that way, don't you think so?"

"Humph," said Bister. "What's the business of this Isaacstein?"

"Mortgages, and things. And he's got a yacht. He's real, all right. And you've no idea how kind. He's always thinking of some little thing to do for you."

"Divorced a couple of times?"

"Oh, you've heard of him, then? Yes, he's never had any luck with women. The third wife cost him almost half a million—alimony and what not. That's what he says. Think of spending half a million on a wife—just being able to, I mean!"

"Wonderful!" said Bister.

"But he's still got a lot of faith in human nature. I guess he's a born optimist, don't you think so? I'm sure I haven't half a million dollars worth of trust in the world! Have you? Oh, do you have to go?"

The music had paused, and Bister drew out his watch. The train had been due for five long minutes!

What would Lynmouth do? Of course he would take a taxi to the place. And so—well, he could explain that he'd punctured a tire. And reached the station just too late!

"Do you *really* have to go?"

He looked down into great, dark eyes, and lips anxiously parted.

"Did Mr. Isaacstein teach you this, too?" asked Bister.

"I don't know what you mean," said the most innocent voice in the world.

"If I keep looking at you," said Bister, "I'll have to stay until you're willing to let me go. And I've missed a train already."

"*So* sorry. But then, there are lots of silly old trains!"

"Kitty Divine, you're making my head spin around like a top!"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"You little devil," said Bister, "you know perfectly well. There was never a pretty girl since the world began that didn't know all about what she could do. And you're something more than pretty, my dear. You're an infernal young beauty, you know!"

He forced his eyes away from her. He allowed himself to become aware of all the scores who were moving about, making their arrangements for the next dance. He recognized a chambermaid here, a groom there, Tim McFarland in the distance talking to a coy little charmer. It was as though he had been dancing in a mist, not able to see a thing except the face of Kitty Divine; and now he noticed that though much attention was turned towards them, yet no eye would meet his. Even Tod Loomis, yonder, seemed unable to recognize his master. And, rather vaguely, he guessed at an explanation. He had stepped for a moment into their world, but they did not wish to make his stay embarrassing. It was almost as

though his ghost stood there among them, guessed at rather than seen.

He looked down to Kitty Divine again. Music had begun—music of a wild rhythm that insinuated itself into his nerves and set his thoughts swaying like shadows on a wall.

"That leash of young fellows is waiting to ask you to dance, Kitty," said he.

"Yes, sir," said she.

"Don't 'sir' me, Kitty."

"No, sir," she said.

"Which one shall I take you to?"

"Whichever one you choose, sir."

"No, by Jove. You're a lot too good for them, and we're going to have this last whirl of a dance, if you'll let me."

She held out her arms, but timidly, as one abashed, uncertain, and afraid, and Bister swept her away, wondering at the sense of pain and delight which possessed him. But the lightness had gone from his step; he was rigid and his eye glared so that one could see that a lion had entered this youth.

For they were going to turn this beautiful, innocent, naïve girl into a moving picture actress under the auspices of the celebrated Isaacstein! He, Bister, would see about that. And was there not such a thing as man's duty to his country—a semi-political responsibility—besides, every man owed to every woman a protection which the poor, tender, silly-minded creatures—how extraordinarily pleasant it was to be virtuous—it was suddenly possible for Bister to visualize himself as a hermit on the one

hand, or on the other, as a benevolent despot, hounded and bent by constant worry for the sake of his people—surrounded by the love and devotion of those to whom he acted as a father——

Tears began to fill the eyes of Bister, it was so overwhelming to find this unexpected virtue in himself—this self-abnegation—this medieval chivalry. Why was man made strong except to shield and protect the weakness of woman? Clinging woman! A fable or a legend of an oak and a vine, somewhere in the back of his mind. Well, it was true. He felt like an oak, powerful, fixed against storms, and this slender, warm, soft creature in his arms——!

He looked down to her again, and the dark, large eyes opened and received his glance, and let it drop like a plummet to the depths of her soul.—And already this pure, simple girl was picking up the jargon of the studios and mechanically learning the artifices of deception and intrigue!

His blood boiled. Thank God he was a Bister. Thank God that he was in his own county. He would handle this affair!

The music paused, began again; paused and began again. Time became nothing. A year could have passed as a breath.

CHAPTER X

It was not really late when he started back for Bister Hall. That is to say, it was not midnight, and if he could rush the car home and get into the house before twelve was striking on the great clock his conscience could be at rest. So home he went with the roar of an open exhaust, only muffled as he drew near to the house, then slipped up the driveway to the garage and was safely inside the hall before the great clock began it muffled, mellow chiming. Gregory came out of the shadows to take his coat and hat.

"Is everyone in bed, Gregory?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Gregory, "except Colonel Bister and Mr. Lynmouth, sir."

"*Except* the two of them?"

"Talking in the Colonel's room, sir."

That was not so auspicious, as a sign.

"How did Lynmouth get here?"

"He telephoned from the station, and we sent down another car for him, sir."

Worse, still. It seemed as though Lynmouth might have taken a taxi, without any bother.

"How is everything, Gregory?"

"Waiting for you, sir, I should say," said Gregory.

"The devil!" said Bister beneath his breath.

"Yes, sir," said Gregory.

"What do you think has happened to me, Gregory?"

"Engine trouble, sir?"

"Why not tires?"

"They'd hardly take so long, would they?"

"Right!" said Bister, grinning, and hurried up the stairs.

The door of his grandfather's room was open, and the colonel lay in his bed propped high with pillows, with a certain shadow between his eyes that Bister was long familiar with. Tall John Bister rose from a corner of the room and came to meet his cousin. He had the blue eyes of a Bister, and yellow hair, that glimmered under the light in the center of the chamber. Bister had forgotten just how big and handsome the fellow was. Now he felt like a terrier in the presence of a noble Great Dane.

"You were delayed, Lindley, it appears," said the dry voice of the colonel.

"Carburetor trouble," said Bister carelessly. "Infernal carburetor choked. Worked like the devil over it. Terribly sorry that I didn't get down to the station to give you a welcome home, Jack, but——" An odd look from Lynmouth checked him.

"Very lucky that the carburetor trouble didn't go down to your feet, Lindley," broke in the colonel.

"I don't know what you mean, sir?"

"You don't, eh? As a matter of fact, you wouldn't. But Jack looked in on you at the dance. Carburetor trouble? Bah!"

The colonel was crimson; Bister was fully as red. Only Lynmouth remained as imperturbably cool as ever.

"Why didn't you speak to me, Jack?" asked Bister with some heat.

"I couldn't know that you'd started to meet me, Lin. And I didn't want to bother you. You seemed fairly busy with that girl; pretty little thing, eh?"

"By heaven, Lindley," cried the colonel, "it seems you were at a barn-dance with the serving maids and men of the entire district! Were you drinking, sir? Are you going to make us a by-word and a mockery among our friends? There was a time when a Bister had a certain portion of self-respect and a sense of what is fitting for a gentleman to do."

"The fact is, sir——"

"Don't answer me! Don't irritate me, Lindley. I hate to be irritated. By God, I'll lose my temper in another moment—and that's a thing I rarely do. Too damned patient. That's my fault! Carburetor trouble! Carburetor trouble! The pair of you get off to bed. Up early, Lindley. I want you to take Jack over to the Bunce sale."

"What, sir?"

"Hello, now! You haven't heard of that? Was she pretty enough to make you deaf, Lindley? It's buzzing everywhere, surely. No, perhaps not in the kitchen circles! The horse you liked—the Prince Regent fellow ——"

"Do you mean Dick Bunce's Mistral? What's happened to him, sir?"

"Should have a bullet through his head. A bullet if he belonged to me He's savaged his master, Lindley. Poor Dick is a smashed and ruined man——"

"Dear God in heaven!" cried Bister. "You should have told me at once! And here I've been standing——"

"Come back, Lin. No, not as bad as that. Dick will recover, but he was badly smashed. And old Mr. Bunce is so upset that he's selling every horse on his place, instantly. To-morrow morning he starts the sale. At ten sharp. Going to get rid of his entire string by auction. And I want you to take Jack over. He'll meet everyone there; and I want you to get me that chestnut five year old mare, Garron Girl, if you can pick her up under two thousand. Away with you!"

"I've put you in a hole with your grandfather, Lin," said Jack Lynmouth apologetically, as they reached the door of his room. "I'm sorry for it, but it'll soon blow over!"

"No," said Bister gloomily, "I've rubbed the old gentleman the wrong way too often, lately. Been escaping from thunder by a hair's—breadth. How did you happen to look in at that dance?"

"Merest chance. Coming in from the station, we went past the Whipple barn and a truck that had brought in a load of dancers was taking half an hour to turn around in the road. So I hopped out and looked in on the fun. There was no missing you, Lin. They were giving you an open channel for yourself and the craft you had in tow."

His glimmering eyes of mirth made Bister turn hot and he cursed himself for his lack of self-control. After all, there was nothing in the world to make him blush except the extraordinary ease and poise of Lynmouth which always unbalanced Bister a little.

"There's something on the mind of the colonel," went on Lynmouth. "His letter was very urgent. Worried me a little."

"Shall I tell you what it was?"

"Not if it isn't on the books, Lin."

"Tush, man. There's no reason why you shouldn't know. The fact is, we're always wrangling, and the other night I had a bit too much under the belt. Made a fool of myself and got the colonel into a war with Judge Postlethwaite. He made up his mind that I wouldn't do as heir of Bister Hall. Thought he'd have a look at your virtues, Jack. And that's why you're here. In the meantime he and I have had a reconciliation. But wait a few days and we'll be out again. Always are that way!"

Lynmouth threw back his head and clapped a hand on the shoulder of his cousin.

"I'm to play a game, then, to cut you out of the Hall, Lin?" he asked, chuckling. "That's rare! But look out for me, old fellow. I'm not rich, you know, and I may be tempted!"

He was still laughing softly as he went into his room. Indeed, it seemed to Bister that his cousin was taking the affair even a little too lightly, but for his own part, as he went into his chamber and undressed, another thought came to him that banished all other concerns from his mind.

If all the Bunce horses were up for sale—and if Mistral was not to be destroyed—why, then, the gray horse would go under the hammer along with the rest. The idea turned him pale with enthusiasm, for having found

the horse of his dreams, it seemed that he was to have a chance to own it.

He remembered, then, that the colonel had declared he would not have such an animal on his place; but that was an opposition which must be mastered or sidestepped. Mistral should be his if God were willing and his private purse could compass the purchase. So he drifted off to sleep but, like a child before Christmas, now and again he wakened and stared into the darkness, his heart crowded with joy and vague expectations of happiness.

At last he dropped into a deep sleep in which he saw himself riding abroad like a knight errant, with pretty Kitty Divine seated on a pad behind his saddle. Dragons and giants fell before his lance, but after every battle he heard laughter, and looking to the side he was sure to see Jack Lynmouth, very modern and very mocking. He was the skeleton at the feast.

When morning came, he was up with almost the first stir in the house. He and Lynmouth sat at an early breakfast for they intended to be at the sale early and look over the horses. There should be bargains on this day, for it seemed hardly possible that the whole countryside could have been advertised of the sale so quickly. Then, after breakfast, he spared a moment to go into the room of the colonel.

He found his grandfather pale and aged from a sleepless night, for his leg was still very painful. Only the bright blue eye was as young as ever.

"Remember," he said. "I want Garron Girl."

"I'll remember, sir, of course."

"And you might try to make up to Jack for the way you slighted him last night."

"Jack's all right about it."

"Don't be too sure! Don't be too sure! Everybody in this world doesn't carry his inmost thoughts in the palm of his hand for all people to look at 'em. Remember that, Lindley. You're a boy, but Lynmouth is a man."

"Poundage," said Bister, a little piqued, "doesn't necessarily mean so much."

"Well, my boy," said the colonel, with a good deal of dark meaning in his look, "I think you'll find that carburetor trouble will never bring Jack Lynmouth into the odd corners of the world."

"That's a little hard to understand," commented Bister.

"Think it over, then. Think it over, because it's worth thought."

Bister, leaving the room, allowed a shadow to fall for an instant upon the brightness of that morning. There was something about Lynmouth that the colonel was taking very seriously, and it might be that all the trouble which he felt he had avoided would return upon him. He even felt, in that moment of gloom, that he might have been playing unnecessarily into the hand of his cousin in telling him what thought had caused the colonel to write to him. However, when he was with Jack Lynmouth again, all doubt quickly left him. Certainly no one could wish to find a more open face and eye!

CHAPTER XI

The roadster swept them away towards the Bunce place.

"Easy, easy!" exclaimed handsome Jack Lynmouth, as they skidded the first turn.

"I won't wreck you, Jack."

"Of course not, but I want to think about horses, not graveyards. What's the good of showing your nerve to eight cylinders and four wheels, Lin? They'll never be able to vote for you!"

Bister, a little disgruntled, checked his usual pace, and fidgeted in his seat until they saw before them the tall barns of the Bunce estate, and the house itself, lodged behind trees made gay by the autumn. But as they came nearer, they saw other cars directed to the same point; it seemed as though the entire countryside were focusing its life on the Bunce place.

"No cheap sales to-day," said big Lynmouth regretfully. "The news has gone everywhere."

"Ay," replied Bister. "They're all bargain hunting, just as we are. There goes Postlethwaite and his girl, now."

"His girl? Has the judge a girl?"

"Ward, niece. Wanted to marry her to me, Jack. Arranged with the colonel. And then I disgraced myself. But she's a good girl, Jack. You ought to look her over. Not made, yet. But she has good stuff in her."

"Thanks," said Lynmouth, "but I'm hunting for a horse, not a wife, to-day."

"Something for yourself?"

"If I can get in around fifteen hundred."

"There should be something at that. What a secretive scoundrel you are, Jack. Coming to buy a horse, and never a word about it to us!"

"But why talk? It wouldn't get me nearer to the horse, would it?"

Bister looked a bit askance at his companion. There was something so large, good-natured, and handsome about Lynmouth that one expected from him a sort of cavalier attitude towards the worries of this life, but instead, there was a tough grain of practical sense that continually came in evidence.

They found a crowd gathered around the paddock where the horses were on view, and Richard Bunce, senior, walking slowly about with a solemn face.

"Yes," Bister heard him say to a group, "I'm through with horses, through with hunting except with a gun over dogs. A fall from a horse shortened the life of my wife by a score of years, I think. And here's Dick nearly done for. Poor Dick! No, sir, I'll never change my mind. They go—all of 'em! The savage brutes need a closer mastery than any man really can give them!"

Bister went on to the house, where he was readily admitted to the room of Dick. He found young Bunce lying swathed in bandages, but twisting restlessly from side to side.

"Good of you to come in, Lin. No, I'm not done for. I'll be hunting again in a month. Let father have his

way with the horses. But I'll beg, borrow, or steal my way into a saddle behind the hounds. Gad, Lin, it's the sweetest thing in life! And how could I give it up?"

"And Mistral?" suggested Bister gently.

There was a pause, and then: "No, Lin, not Mistral. He beat me fairly and squarely. He had me out of the saddle in two minutes, once his mind was made up to it. And then he tried to eat me! No, he might have done for a warhorse, in the old days. But not for politer things!"

"Are you quite through with him?"

"Absolutely. If you'd seen—but there's nothing in your own mind about him, Lin?"

"I'm going to look him over. I don't know!"

"Come back here, man. Let me tell you——"

"Don't argue. I've got to make up my mind for myself."

Back to the paddock he went, and saw the horses tethered or being walked about for the sake of curious prospective bidders. There were already half a dozen working over the jumps in the schooling ground.

He saw the good mare, Garron Girl, taking a hurdle in faultless style, her feet neatly tucked up in the way that means so much to a heavyweight hunter. And Lynmouth already was examining the points of a brown gelding. His serious face showed his interest and Bister paused to give the horse a glance. It was good, solid stuff. Eleven years in age, well schooled, steady as a rock, and guaranteed to carry even Lynmouth's hundred and ninety-odd pounds. But one look into his face showed what his soul was made of. One could never expect brilliance from that mount, and the rider would have to be hunting

the easy, weak places in every stiff fence. Bister shook his head, and walked on in some disgust. It had been that way with Lynmouth when he was in college and playing in a rival team. A good, steady guard, strong as iron, thoughtful, alert, powerful in making holes and ready with stiff interference, but there was never a flash of genius, never a sudden thrust through the line such as blocks a kick or nails an enemy back yards and yards behind the scrimmage. However, there was a value in men who were without brilliance.

"The most valuable man in my team!" Lynmouth's coach had said of him in his last year.

"To hell with such value," said Bister in his heart, and found Mistral the next moment. There was a crowd about him at a comfortable distance, admiring his points, and commenting on his flattened ears and dilated nostrils, and red-stained eyes. It seemed as though the storm in which he had downed his young master still raged in his heart; he was a very picture of suppressed malice and danger. And yet those evils of the spirit were to Bister as a bright light which picked out the points of the perfect hunter: a forehand light and high, with pronounced withers, shoulders and pasterns very long and sloping, big of hocks, strong as a rock behind the saddle. But it was not the details which the eye picked up one by one that counted. It was the whole picture as it flew home to the brain of the huntsman; so that Mistral, standing, seemed as light and swift as the wind for which he was named; and from the loins to the heels one felt the wiry strength which would thrust him over obstacles or carry him flying along the flat.

"Ay, sir," said a voice behind Bister, "he's a rare one. A beauty and a devil. You look at a horse like that, and you can't tell whether he's just ate a man, or whether he's just gunna eat one. It's blood that makes a pack riot, sir!"

He turned and saw Muldoon, the tavernkeeper.

"Clancy," said Bister, his eyes turning back with a haunted look to the stallion, "is he such a devil, do you think?"

"Man makes the body of a horse," said Muldoon philosophically. "But God puts the soul in 'em. You can breed 'em fine, all right. But God, he puts in the finishing touches, in spite of you. Ain't I right, sir? Look at the beauty of him, will you? If he'd only prick his ears, he'd be the kindest lookin' nag in the world. But there ain't nothin' but hell in the heart of him. I wouldn't have him; I wouldn't even have the picture of him, in a stable, for fear that he'd sour all the rest."

"Go find somebody, Clancy, and have a saddle clapped on him, will you?"

There was a bit of silence, and then Muldoon plucked his sleeve.

"D'ye mean that, sir?"

"I mean it! I mean it! Run along, Clancy, will you?"

Another pause, then: "Well, if the fight's in you, it'd better come out while there's some to watch and take care of you."

And Muldoon brought not a single groom, but three of them, and he and several others lent their strength and skill. So they managed to snub Mistral short against

a post, and after that they got a blanket and saddle on him. Not all at once, and not at the first trial, for sometimes the twisting, flashing body of the stallion looked like a silver-bladed sword, thrusting savagely to take blood.

"Are you ready, sir?" gasped Muldoon.

Bister said not a word. He was trembling from head to heel, and he was very sick in the pit of the stomach, and yet he did not want to turn back, for he felt that in that horse there was something that was worth the risk of a life to possess. He got to Mistral and heard someone saying: "You'd better stop that show! Bister's in a blue funk, already—and not much wonder!"

That was the whiplash that sent him into the saddle on the fly. Mistral, his head loosed, tried to poke his nose into the sky. Descending, he stood nearly on his head. But the desperate grip in the knees of Bister kept him in his place. There followed a mad whirl of bucking and plunging, until the gray straightened with the bit in his teeth and made straight at the nearest fence. It was a tall fence, at that, and remembering what Bunce had said of the horse never jumping a stick, Bister braced himself against a refusal. It was as though the horse had turned into a javelin hurled by a godlike hand, so strongly did Mistral take that jump. Bister, in mid-air, struggled back into the seat which he had nearly lost, and from which he was almost jerked again in the next instant as the gray landed in a lane beyond the paddock and instantly hurdled the barrier to the schooling ground.

Bucking had not brought enough results to please the stallion, and therefore he decided to try jumping. Over

those hurdles he went with dizzy speed, and such ease that Bister was simply conscious of wires coiling and uncoiling beneath him, and conscious, too, of the glorious wind of that gallop cutting against his face. But just as he warmed to the work and settled to his best riding form, Mistral stopped with four stiffly planted legs. Stopped as though he had run into a wall, and Bister was torn from the saddle and hurled forward across the brush jump which they had just reached.

As he rolled on his back, he had sight of Mistral vaulting above him, with savage head turned to look down for his prey—a nightmare sight to Bister. He scrambled to his feet in time to dodge the first charge. Men were running hastily towards him, shouting and waving their arms to drive away the man-killer, but Mistral heeded them no more than if they were summer clouds in the sky. He came with his snaky head thrust out, his mouth yawning, and as Bister dodged, the big horse swerved in turn and reared to strike the man to the earth with his armed forehoofs. The flaring reins gave Bister his cue; he caught them as a hammerstroke grazed his head, and jerked sideways upon them with all his might. That pull caught the gray off-balance; he staggered heavily and before he righted himself, Bister was in the saddle again.

A swarm of grooms and others gathered about Mistral at the same moment. A rope was flung over his head, and so he was secured and led away, with Bister very glad to slip to the ground and walk.

Even walking was a difficult task for the moment; he was shaking from head to foot, and a mist of blackness swam before his eyes. It had been a very near thing,

to be sure; just a bit more would have finished him, and he felt that he would never forget that picture of the horse sailing the brush-jump and looking down with tiger-ish malice for the man he had just shaken from his back.

Jack Lynmouth, riding the brown gelding, came up to him.

"How is it, Lin?"

"He's a devil!" said Bister. "A perfect devil."

"Ay," said another. "A perfect horse, and a perfect devil. Who had the spoiling of that horse in the first place, I wonder? One hears of better trainers than that in Kentucky!"

"You're well out of that, Lin," said Jack Lynmouth. "But you have to keep putting your head in the lion's mouth, and this is what you get for it."

He galloped away to try his gelding over the jumps, and Bister watched him sailing them in perfect form—a good seat and a good pair of hands, and all the system of correct riding worked out faultlessly. There was only one lack, and that was a touch of the fire which remolds horse and rider and makes them one flesh and spirit. Yet such work as Lynmouth's would enable him to beat the field in many a hotly contested hunt, and Bister knew it well, as he watched. Slow and sure will win many a race, even when foxes are footing it across country.

They got up to the ring in time to find the sale just beginning, and, as a matter of course, Mistral was the first one on the block. All auctioneers must have a sense of humor, and this one did not fail in it.

"You have seen Mistral, ladies and gentlemen," said he. "There he is—a picture-horse. Most of you have

heard how he performs. And if you haven't heard, you've had a chance to see Mr. Lindley Bister perform with the stallion. However, Mr. Bunce will guarantee that the *horse* is sound, and we are open to bids from all those who carry sufficient life insurance."

The horror of Mistral in action was too recent in the eyes of that crowd, and there was no smile for the auctioneer's little jest.

"Look down his pedigree, gentlemen," went on the auctioneer. "You'll find the Prince Regent strain coming in four times. He's something to breed to. His get may not be ladies' stuff but it ought to seat many a two-handed man. Tough wood—it won't crack under a strain. We'd recommend Mistral, also, to disappointed business men; to the incurably sick; and to unhappy young lovers. He may end all their troubles. In fact, Mistral is apt to be the last trouble that enters a man's life. Now, what is offered for him?"

"I'll give fifty. He *might* do well crossed with the Hermiston strain. They're a sleepy lot," explained one.

"A very excellent idea," commented the auctioneer. "Fifty dollars is offered for this peerless beauty. Sixty, sir? Thank you. Mr. Purvis offers sixty dollars for Mistral——"

"Seventy-five," said a rather hoarse voice, with so much meaning that all heads turned and saw Bister, his lean face white and set, and the blue, Bister eyes glittering with determination. A little whisper and gasp ran around the circle, for they understood at once. This mad young man had not had enough. He was not buying the stallion to breed, but to ride. There was a murmur

of protest and horror; and then silence. For every soul that was present felt that here was the beginning of a tragedy. "I think I'll go to eighty," said Mr. Purvis. "Be reasonable, Lin, will you?"

"One hundred," said Bister.

"Ah, well," murmured Purvis, "if you're in earnest, of course you must have your own way. Good luck to you, Lin."

"Are there any further offers? This horse is going to Mr. Lindley Bister—going to Mr. Bister—at a hundred dollars—for really peerless breeding, gentlemen. I beg you to reconsider, if your horses need a cross of new blood and pure! A hundred and ten? Thank you, sir! Now, Mr. Bister?"

There was a panting whisper near Bister. Tim McFarland and Clancy Muldoon had worked their way through the crowd until they were close to him. They held a frightened boy between them.

"Don't do it, sir!" breathed Muldoon. "We got the reason out of the kid, here. Don't do it, Mr. Bister, for God's sake. For once you have him, you'll never rest till he's killed you, or you've killed him. But good you'll never have out of him!"

"Fifty," said Bister.

"A hundred and fifty," said the pleased auctioneer. "I'm glad to see you gentlemen so reasonable. A hundred and fifty-five."

"Two hundred," said Bister, calmly.

"Ah, well, Lindley," broke out the rival, "if you're bound to fill your hands with dynamite, I'm done. I

hope that you don't have to pay more than dollars for the beast, old fellow."

"Going to Mr. Bister for two hundred. Really, a gift, gentlemen. For the pleasure of stepping out and seeing him in one's pasture, merely. At two hundred—going, going and gone. Sold to Mr. Lindley Bister!"

So Mistral was his!

CHAPTER XII

The judge and Halcyone found Bister walking round and round Mistral in a small corral by the stables; to one side waited Tim McFarland and Clancy Muldoon, a boy between them. They seemed filled with information which they were eager to impart, but Bister gave them no chance.

"Good morning, Lindley," said the judge.

"Too big in the breast, for speed," said Bister, with a sigh.

"Good morning, Lindley," said the girl.

"Morning, morning!" Bister tossed over his shoulder. "No, not too wide. It's wind, that's all. Means cubic yards of air in his lungs."

"What are you going to do with it, Lindley?" asked the judge. Bister seized him by the arm and dragged him forward.

"Look at that cannon, judge!" he exclaimed. "Ever see another like it, except in a draft horse?"

"Ay," said the judge. "He has substance."

"But you really wouldn't try to ride that murderer again, Lindley?" suggested the girl.

"All shoulder and forearm and pastern," said Bister, drawing in his breath hard and deep. "Look at that pastern, as long and springy as the leg of a jackrabbit! Hello, Halcyone."

"Hello," said Halcyone, "will you help us to find a horse for me here?"

"Dick—poor chap—said he didn't know how to jump. Well, you saw him. Floats, judge. Like a bubble over the fences."

"It's no good," said Judge Postlethwaite. "There's no sense in him this morning, and we'll have to use our own eyes for this business. However, two heads are better than one. There's Lynmouth. He'll give us a hand. A good, steady brain in that fellow."

They started off, stopped suddenly by the voice of Bister.

"Hey, Halcyone!"

"Confound him, he talks as if you were a man!" exclaimed the judge, frowning. But Halcyone was laughing, as she turned.

"Yes, Lindley?"

"Still riding?"

"Yes. Still learning."

"I have a horse for you. That eight year old Kempis, judge."

"Your own horse, Lin? A beauty, too. Hal. And steady as rock. How much?"

"Nothing," said Bister. "Loomis'll take him over this afternoon and show you his tricks."

"But I couldn't take him, this way!" protested Halcyone.

Bister turned his back on them.

"What about him behind the saddle, Tim. Will he ever let a man down?"

"Don't refuse that horse," the judge said to his niece.

"But how can I take a good hunter from a man I've met only three times?"

"Nonsense! Postlethwaites and Bisters have known each other for centuries. You'll anger him if you refuse. Probably Kempis hasn't enough foot for that young daredevil. Take the horse and thank God for him. Lindley likes you, my dear."

She looked quickly up to him.

"*Do* you think so?"

"Tush! Not a doubt! Not a doubt!"

"But he never so much as looks at me."

"Because you're not a horse, child. Lin is young. Youngest thing that walks this planet, I suppose. Come along back to the sale. Isn't that Garron Girl they have on the block?"

"He'll never let down till his heart breaks," Clancy Muldoon was saying to Bister. "But will he ever break his heart for any rider? Listen to what this kid has to say about that. Speak up, son!"

Bister laid a hand on either shoulder of the stable-boy and pushed him back to arm's length.

"Now, youngster, can you talk truth when you talk horse?"

"So help me God, sir, I ain't going to tell you a thing that Lefty ain't told me straight!"

"Who's Lefty?"

"The boy that brought Mistral from Kentucky."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere in the crowd watching the sale."

"Then get Lefty and we'll have it straight from him."

"Lefty's a queer one, sir. I dunno that he'd talk out."

"Queer, is he? Well, we'll try what we can do with him. Bring me Lefty at the double."

The youth disappeared in the crowd.

"The whole stable is scared to death of this gray fiend," said Tim McFarland.

"I know it—I know it! But isn't that what we want? A tamed devil for hunting, eh?"

"Tame a devil and you have a horse. But the trick's in taming him. Here comes Lefty. Nasty lookin' little rat, ain't he!"

Lefty was a narrow-shouldered youth of indeterminate age. Somewhere between thirteen and thirty his growth had been stopped—perhaps by a savage course of training to make weight—and at the same instant that his young body was arrested and forced into maturity before its time, his mind also was foisted from its normal course and made to crystallize. He looked half boy and half man, as irresponsible and shifty as the one and as hard as the other.

He came to a halt before Bister, shifted his cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other, at the tip of a dexterous tongue, and touched his cap.

"Now, Lefty," said Bister, "you know something about Mistral. Let's have it in a hurry, because I want to get back to the sale. I have something to do there."

"Plenty of time, sir. Tell you later."

"Suppose that I don't see you again?"

"You're takin' Mistral home, ain't you?"

"Well?"

"Then you'll be takin' me, too, I guess!"

And he grinned oddly at Bister.

"He's a tough kid," said Clancy Muldoon. "Lemme handle him, sir. I'll wring some sense out of him, fast enough. These tough kids, they was made for me to handle. I know 'em the way that you'd know potatoes, if you'd growed 'em!"

In response to this speech, Lefty flashed his glance towards the tavernkeeper and then let it wander slowly up and down his body with exactly the manner of a pugilist selecting the spot where he will strike his opponent.

There was so astonishingly little fear in this regard that Bister decided it would be wiser to keep the questioning in his own hands.

"Let him alone, Muldoon," said he. "Now tell me why I'll be taking you home with Mistral?"

"Why," said Lefty, "will your stableboys handle—this?"

He pointed to the stallion, and as Bister did not reply, he added: "Or maybe *you'll* be handling him?"

"Hold on," said Bister. "Do you mean to say that you are the one to handle Mistral?"

"Who else?" asked Lefty, and with another sneering look at Muldoon, he advanced towards the gray horse—carelessly—with his head still turned towards the men, and one hand reaching blindly towards Mistral.

Frozen with interest, the others watched as they would have watched a snake charmer enter a den of writhing cobras, or a daredevil walk up to a tiger in the wildest jungle. But the great, the terrible Mistral merely pricked his ears and turning his head, snuffed at the shoulder of the boy with a manifest pleasure. Theoretically, it should

have been a delightful thing to see that slender, frail-bodied boy walk so fearlessly towards the man-eater, but as a matter of fact, Bister was filled with suspicion and disgust. It seemed totally unnatural that this sneaking, crafty-eyed youth should exercise such authority over the noblest and the fiercest horse that Lindley Givven Bister had ever known. It was like a companionship between a snake and a lion.

However, there was the boy at the head of the stallion, patting the arched neck and flicking his eyes from face to face with a grin of satisfaction as he drank in the expressions of bewilderment.

"Very well," said Bister, "can you tell me about this horse? What do you know about him?"

"Me? Everything except one."

"What one?"

"What turned him bad. I dunno that."

"He wasn't always a devil, then?"

"Him? He was like a lapdog. Give him a smile and he tried to sit down in your lap. Till he was full two."

"Then he changed?"

"Then he savaged his first man. Got the taste for that sort of work. You know what he is now. Been the same ever since."

Bister restlessly walked around the tall gray as though hoping that the mystery might be less baffling, viewed from the other side. As he came back he asked: "First, what's the stuff in Mistral? Prince Regent strain, eh?"

"Tons of it. Look, he's by Proper out of Dangerous ——"

"Proper won the Suburban not so long ago."

"That's him. Dangerous never done no racing. Broke down in training, but she had a sweet turn, she had. She was out of the Lofty Lady, by the great Brighton, ya know."

"Brighton? I know. He's strong enough on that side. What was Proper from?"

"Nothin' else than Parade, sir, out of Anne Boleyn."

"Parade!" cried Lindley Bister, his face shining. "The great Parade, from Sirocco, from Prince Regent. God bless me, what blood! What blood, Clancy, eh? Do you hear it?"

"Ay," agreed Clancy. "I see it, too. But what good is blood in the stable, I'd ask you? Or what good is blood in the pasture? Ain't it blood on the hunting field or the race track that's worth while? And could you ever put Mistral there?"

"Speak up, Lefty," said Bister. "If you know Mistral, tell me. Will he ever be put to any account? *Has* he ever been used?"

"Once," said Lefty.

"Talk out, talk out, lad. What was it?"

"Did you ever hear of Be Easy?"

"No," said Bister.

"I have, though," broke in Tim McFarland. "I know about him. And he won money for me."

"Was he good?" asked young Lefty.

"He was, when he was right. But the dog had the worst legs under him that ever carried a racer. Brittle as matches. Broke up all the time."

"Well," said Lefty, "they didn't take up Mistral till

he was a full two-year old. Then Dr. Crandal thought he'd see if the colt could gallop."

"Dr. Crandal the trainer?"

"The owner. Dr. Algernon Crandal. Month or so after Mistral had begun working, Dr. Crandal put a nigger up on Be Easy, and me on Mistral. I was giving that nigger five or six pounds and a year! Well, it was only five furlongs, and Be Easy, used to a sprinting start, he got away a couple of lengths at the beginning."

"'Don't kill the gray!' sings out Mr. Crandal. 'You can't catch Be Easy!'

"Well, we caught Be Easy inside the first quarter, and the last three-eighths I was standing in the stirrups pulling that two-year old in, but still he was running away from Be Easy. You ask me if he was ever any use. Well, a horse that can run a trial like that is use, I'd say! And Be Easy was right, that day!"

"What time for the five furlongs?" asked Bister eagerly.

"Dr. Crandal never told nobody about that."

"Very well. And then?"

"Then there was a lot of excitement. Dr. Crandal was going to clean up everything in the country, to hear him talk. But the next time that he sent Mistral out for work, I wasn't good enough to ride. No, he had to get a fancy jockey from away out East in Baltimore. Well, Mistral didn't like him. He went mad. And he's been mad ever since. You're the seventh man that's owned Mistral in three years."

"And how many has he killed?" asked Bister.

"Only two, actually killed," said Lefty. And a sort

of snarling grin appeared on his face. "He ain't had much luck, even though he's a sharpshooter."

"He's five, now?" asked Bister, overlooking the malevolent intonation of Lefty.

"Five, sir."

"And you've been with him all this time?"

"They can't handle Mistral without me, sir."

"Ay," said Tim McFarland. "And you ain't been teaching the dog tricks, have you, kid?"

Lefty turned sharply upon the big Irishman, and his left hand went out in a stiff gesture of disdain and repulsion.

"You guys, you got nothin' on me," said Lefty. "You don't ask me nothin' and I don't ask you nothin', and we're square. But if I got to see much of you, I'll be telling' you that I don't take lip not even from my boss, and I ain't gunna begin takin' none of it from a couple o' hams like the pair of you!"

So spoke Lefty, offensively enough, but there was more in his tone than in his words or his gestures. It was the very type of the youth who seeks for trouble, and cares not when it comes. Tim McFarland was so enraged that he lunged straight for Lefty, but Clancy caught him. "Are you carryin' a knife or a gun with you, these days?" he asked.

"Why should I be?"

"If you want to talk to that young vermin. Look at him!"

Lefty had not moved when the charge threatened, but stood with his arms folded, and his lean hands thrust

inside the breast of his coat; and all the while his sneering smile rejoiced in the prospect of danger ahead.

"Look!" said Clancy Muldoon. "If there's anything wrong with the gray, it's because he's caught a dose of poison from that rat, Mr. Lindley!"

"Hold on, by gad," cried Bister, "I've quite forgot about Garron Girl. Has she been sold? Has she come up, yet?"

"Gone, sir!"

Bister hurried to make inquiries, and suddenly he breathed more deeply and freely, learning that the good mare had gone to Jack Lynmouth, as had the brown gelding, also; Lynmouth had started home with his purchases.

"Take the roadster home for me, Tim," said Bister. "I'm going to walk back with the gray."

"Walk?" cried Lefty. "Hey, what the hell's the idea? Walk?"

He needed a whip, this youngster, as badly as any boy that ever had come to the knowledge of Bister, but as he had ordered, the thing was done. Lefty untethered the monster; and off they started down the road with Lefty leading, and Bister ranging from side to side and before and behind his new purchase.

He could think back to many great moments—his first pony, his first suit of "man-clothes," his first game with the varsity,—but nothing compared with to-day. It was as though he never before had seen a horse walk, noticing the bend of the long pasterns, or the broad hocks that quivered never a jot when the rear heels struck the road. Even the slight nodding of Mistral's head seemed

a delightful thing; and the wind which ruffled the thin mane was caressing "my horse." Yes, all the autumn world was richer with purples and more deeply burnished with gold because Mistral that day had become his horse!

CHAPTER XIII

All was excitement at the stables when at length, dusty, hot, but joyful, Bister appeared with the boy and the horse behind him.

"We're taking on this new boy with Mistral," said Bister. "You can talk wages and what-not to him, Loomis."

"I've heard of him," said Loomis sourly. "And it's grand news about the Point to Point, sir!"

"What news?"

"Didn't they have it at the sale?"

"No news except this at the sale, as far as I was concerned," admitted Bister.

"Mr. Osborne has raised the purse five thousand for this running. That made a lot of the others chip in. There'll be fifteen thousand in that purse, sir, when the running comes; and they've stretched the course to five miles, from Pendleton to Tyndal Green."

"That'd be straight through Borrogate."

"No, the town's cut out, and the road. It'll throw them over the hills."

"Five miles will just warm up Mistral. Look him over, Tod. If we can get him ready for the race, we'll bring home that purse, man."

Tod Loomis possessed manners as good as another's, but now he permitted himself to smile.

"I said a purse of fifteen thousand, sir," said he. "And that'll bring the best in the country."

"Admitted. But look at Mistral."

"A pretty horse, sir."

"Pretty, Loomis? Pretty? Is that all you can say about him?"

"I haven't seen how he handles," said Loomis dryly. "But Colonel Bister wishes to speak with you as soon as you come home."

Chance was conveniently near the front door as Bister entered and at the questioning look from his younger master, he shook his head gravely.

"Well," said Bister, "I'll have the colonel in a better humor in a few moments. Go out and see the finest horse you ever clapped eyes on and——"

"No, sir," said Chance with firmness. "You'd better come up to your room with me, for a moment."

One solemn glance was exchanged between them, and then Bister went obediently to his room, and Chance closed the door behind him.

"I'd wash up and cool off, sir," said the valet.

"But what the devil is up now?" asked Bister, running a double stream of water into the wash bowl. "What has gone wrong?"

"Exactly what, sir, I don't know." He paused a little, and added: "Mr. Lynmouth is now with Colonel Bister."

"Lynmouth? Well, what of that? What are you making of that?"

"Trouble!" said Chance with a sudden vehemence. "It seems to me that Mr. Lynmouth has brought trouble into the room, sir!"

It was a speech so extraordinarily outspoken that Bister with soap in his ears and water dripping from nose and chin, turned to stare.

"I can't explain beyond that, sir! I don't mean to say too much, but it seems a very serious affair. Very, very!"

"I wonder what about?" said Bister, frowning at the ceiling.

"Nothing that you know of?"

"Nothing that I can think of."

"The colonel, sir, is extremely still—and he's asked for you three times. Three separate times!"

"Damn it!" cried Bister, "it's got to end! I won't be hounded like a schoolboy any longer!"

And jerking his tie into place, his face half dried, and his hair uncombed, he huddled into a coat and rushed from his room and down the hallway to the door of the colonel.

It was open, so that the cool breeze of the afternoon could blow through, and inside the chamber Bister saw Jack Lynmouth, who nodded and smiled at him.

"I've been telling the colonel how you stuck to Mistral," said Lynmouth. "A devilish good thing that was, Lin!"

But the colonel, without waiting to hear the rejoinder, requested Lynmouth to leave the room.

"Sit here," he said to Bister, when the other had gone out and closed the door. "Sit here where the light can fall on your face a little. I need to see you as well as hear you, to-day."

"There's something important," said Bister.

"There's an old story," resumed the colonel, as his grandson sat down, "about the camel which carried a very large load and the owner was sure that the weight of another handful of straw would do no harm. So he tossed it on. But that last straw was just enough to turn the beam of the scales. It was what broke the camel's back! Do you remember that fable?"

"It's proverbial, of course, sir."

"There's a double meaning in proverbs, my boy. There's a distinct and double meaning to them. They ought to be taken home and lodged in the heart. Do you understand?"

Bister was silent, watching and waiting.

The quiet voice of the colonel suddenly changed to a roar.

"Do you understand?" he repeated.

"No," said Bister. "I don't know what's in the air."

The colonel had raised himself upon his elbows to shout his last question, but now he sank slowly back until he was half buried in the pillows which supported him, and from this position he gaped at Bister open-mouthed.

"You don't know?" echoed the colonel, faintly.

"No, sir."

"Seems to you that you've done nothing particularly wrong, to-day?"

"I'm trying to think," replied Bister, suiting the action to the word. "No, I don't know what can be bothering you."

The colonel closed his eyes and smiled. A smile of agony! His forehead and cheeks were a deep purple;

his lips were very white, and Bister stared in amazement. He never before had seen the old man in such a furious passion, and yet his evil temper had been shown a hundred or a thousand times before.

At last the grandfather opened his blue eyes again, but he did not recommence the talk at once. Instead, he remained staring up to the ceiling with a considerate look, as though he were reading words of a grave importance.

"Most extraordinary!" said the colonel, keeping his voice soft, but unable to rule out the tremor of fury that was in it. "Garron Girl!" he concluded with a snap.

"She got here, all right?" said Bister vaguely.

"What price?"

"Price? We got her inside your figure."

"We?" said the colonel.

At this, Bister found himself at check and cast back and forward and to either side to try to pick up the right line; but he was at seat, for it seemed impossible to him that Lynmouth could have explained the full truth to his grandfather.

"Lynmouth did the actual buying," he admitted.

"It's hard to believe!" declared the older man. "By heaven, sir, we've barely been reconciled. Nothing but shining duty, peace and good-will in prospect. And then we come to this! What were you doing, sir, when you should have been bidding for Garron Girl?"

Anger burned up in the eyes of Bister, but it could not last long, for he held in his soul a vision of beauty more perfect and satisfying to him than the beauty of choiring angels in heaven.

"Sir," he said with a burst of strong enthusiasm, "the

fact is that they threw up Mistral for a song. By heaven, sir, they started the bidding at fifty dollars—simply because he has a touch of temper! I got him—you'll not believe it!—I got him for two hundred. Had him over the jumps in the first place. You remember that Dick said he couldn't jump. Wasn't made. Why, sir, the horse is nothing but springs and cushions. Tossed over the fences like a bird on the wing. And if we steady him a bit, he's a chance for the Point to Point, and the big purse. I tell you, sir, I can see the vase; it's as good as ours, if Mistral can be steadied a shade!"

The colonel closed his eyes again and listened to this speech, but he found it so difficult to control himself that his hands and lips twitched violently.

"You're not doing it to madden me," he said at last. "No, I want to keep that firmly in mind. You're not purposely insulting me."

"Insulting you?" echoed Bister, now truly aghast.

"It isn't that," said the colonel, "but it simply means that you're so bent on your own purposes and so securely wrapped in yourself that what passes in the minds of others is of no importance. I'm going to control myself. I shall not lose my temper. But by the eternal God, sir, Mistral leaves this place. I told you so before. I shall not have him. A man-killer and a devil! The Prince Regent strain has taken the life of one Bister, and it shall not take the life of another. But I've told you this before. Did you think I was saying a piece? Am I a child, a fool, an imbecile? Am I to be obeyed in my own house? Lindley, you've broken my heart. Stamped and spurned my desires. Neglected my smallest requests.

Even insulted your poor cousin with your insolent selfishness. Leave the room, sir, before I lose my temper—or go mad—go mad—go mad!"

At this thundering command, Bister fumbled his way out of the room. A bell was ringing violently, and Chance hurried to answer it; paused sharply at the sight of Bister, and then went on. As for Bister, he turned in at the room of Jack Lynmouth.

He found the latter changing a necktie and whistling cheerfully at his image in the glass.

"Hello, Lin," said he. "Sit down. Heard the colonel rumbling in the distance. Heated up about something, isn't he?"

"You let him know that it was you who bid in the mare for him," said Bister, in a voice that made his tall cousin whirl about.

"Well, well, well!" said Lynmouth. "And what's it all about? If you've had a dressing-down, don't take it out on me, old fellow!"

"I'm holding myself hard," declared Bister. "I don't want to say anything too sharp, but it looks to me as though you've been very—careless, Jack."

Lynmouth stepped to the center of the room; there was something in his manner that made Bister think of an actor taking the center of the stage.

"Look here," said Lynmouth, "you're not trying to high-hand me, are you?"

And he waited, a mountain of strength, coolness, and poise, looking Bister up and down. "I'm asking you a question, and that's all," replied the latter. "Why did you tell the colonel that you bid in the mare?"

"And why not? I did, didn't I?"

It staggered Bister. "You understand how we've always been—at swords' points," explained he. "And knowing that, how could you have opened the door for the colonel's temper?"

"You're making a lot out of a little," replied Lynmouth. "Don't be a silly ass over it, Lin. As a matter of fact, I didn't think twice about the thing. I have something other than horses on the brain."

It was not a particularly apt time for such a remark, and it brought from Bister the hasty answer: "That's a hit below the belt, Jack! And it makes me think that you've fouled me purposely when you talked with the colonel."

There was a rap at the door.

"If you take that line," said Lynmouth, "you don't bother me, my dear fellow. Not as much as this."

Going to answer the knock at his door, he snapped his fingers lightly, and almost in Bister's face.

It was Chance at the door, with a message that the colonel wished to see Mr. Lynmouth at that gentleman's earliest convenience, so tall Jack strode off down the hall at once and left Chance closing the door slowly, slowly, for through the narrowing gap the valet was studying the pale and furious face of his younger master.

CHAPTER XIV

LYNMOUTH, entering the room of the colonel, had a question flung at him like a weapon: "What's your name, sir?"

"John Bister Lynmouth," he replied.

It seemed that this was the correct answer, for the eye of the old man grew less fiery and he looked upon the tall and handsome fellow with a sort of melancholy interest.

"You're a Bister, then?" he asked.

"I think you know that, sir. As much of a Bister," added Lynmouth, "as Lin is, for instance."

The colonel took no offense at this, but he nodded his assent and remarked that he had noticed the picture of Sir Walter Bister often enough to mark the resemblance between Jack and the old knight. "Did you ever hear of Sir Walter?" asked the colonel.

"The man who beat off Lambert's Puritan devils?" asked Jack in turn.

"Ha?" cried the colonel. "You *do* know a bit about the thing, then! Not such a complete Lynmouth—not above studying the Bister records a little, eh?"

"My grandmother taught me the old legends at her knees, sir," said Lynmouth. "She was as staunch a Bister as ever lived, and she used to teach me all the old family history. The Lynmouths have been rather a sleepy lot, but the Bisters have a history behind them."

"They have a history behind them," said the colonel, "but God alone knows what sort of a history there will be for them in the future, for we've fallen on evil days. Evil days, Jack, evil days!"

Lynmouth was discreetly silent, for all that his brain was working at a breakneck pace, for silence was not what the colonel wanted at that instant, and he suddenly cried: "By heavens, I think you have the same thought yourself!"

"About the Bisters?" echoed Lynmouth, as in horror. "Why, sir, I've felt that they were as fixed and permanent as the Borrogate Hills! I'm simply dumbfounded by what you say!"

This seemed to appease the old man a little, but he was still breathing hard for a moment, and Lynmouth knew that he had touched the tiger in a tender place. In the meantime, his excitement was growing, and before him he saw the vague outlines of a goal at which he hardly dared to guess. By intuition he felt it, building largely on the very direct statements which Bister himself had made. So he roused himself to watch the fall of every card, and determined to miss no trick that was within the range of his hand.

"I am going to tell you about another matter, Jack," said the colonel in a changed voice. "I am going to tell you about quite another thing. I'll open a door that looks in on my heart of hearts!"

Jack Lynmouth answered gravely: "Sir, you honor me."

The young blue eyes under that old grey brow blazed suddenly at Lynmouth and he trembled a little for

fear that he had overdone his part. No, that was the fire of enthusiasm, and not the cold light of criticism which was kindling in the colonel.

"Go to the window, my boy."

Lynmouth obeyed.

"Look south, lad. And what do you see?"

"I see the towers of Purchas Manor, to the west, just turning blue in the distance; south are the Borrogate Hills; and east is a smoke smudge over Ryedale, as I suppose."

"You know the lay of the land," remarked the colonel. "Your grandmother *has* talked to you, I see. And now tell me—what does a family need to maintain its strength?"

"Acres, sir, I presume."

"Tell me why?" asked the colonel, with an eagerness that told Lynmouth he was on the right track.

"Why, sir, hard cash is flashy stuff, but it doesn't amount to much. The really good things grow out of the ground—pasture grass, crops, and the horses, you know. Yes, and the houses must have ground to stand on. In one block of Manhattan there's far more cash value than all this that I can take in with my eye. But in all of New York City, I wonder if there's half the real worth and beauty that there is here?"

"You answer yourself!" exclaimed the colonel. "You answer yourself, by heaven. And—I see that you are a man of discernment, Jack. Yes, in these breakneck days, it is astonishing to find a lad whose heart is right."

Lynmouth bowed his handsome and modest head.

"Look out again, Jack. I tell you, once the Bister

lands ran from here—and far north, too—and swept across the ridges of the Borrogate Hills, and on a far corner of them Ryedale was built; and on another corner Purchas Manor and park afterwards grew up. It was all the Bister estate."

"So my grandmother told me."

"She did? And you haven't forgotten!"

"No, sir, and it's a sad thing to see how the old tree has dwindled. A very sad thing, sir!"

"Dwindled, yes, dwindled!" cried the colonel, with a groan. "The branches have been lopped off. Rich acres, once. Now lost—shrunk to this little nook and corner of the grand old place. Heartbreaking! Deficit. That's what it spells. No longer self-supporting. Bister Hall's become a luxury, a toy, a plaything. Supported, by God, by the income from my holdings of dirty railroad stock. Railroads. See how we've descended, my lad! See how we've fallen!"

The head of Lynmouth bowed again, in thought, in sadness. Only from the corner of his eye he watched the old fellow with a keen glance, tense with eagerness to play his part. A little more and he would know what was expected from him!

"You're the right stuff, Jack; I feel and see that you're the right stuff. Old Sir Walter lives again in you. The true Bister strain. Why shouldn't I open my heart to you?"

"I hear you, sir, as reverently as though my own father were speaking."

"I think you do. Can see you do. Warms my heart,

too! Not like Lindley. God, what a gap between his way and yours! What a gap! What a gap!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Lindley——"

"Don't defend him! Don't irritate me, Jack. By God, I'm the coolest man in the world, but there are limits to my endurance! I've stood too much. Turned into a house dog, to be kicked about—but let me get back to the point. I saw a glorious way to re-establish the Bisters. No, not on as broad a foundation as they had in the old days. But one broad enough. You understand? I saw a chance to treble our wealth and power. By a magnificent alliance! You hear me, Jack?"

"A glorious idea, sir!"

"Seven million dollars worthy of glory, Jack. Ah, God, when I think of it! No, not that I care for the mere money. Scorn the dirty dollars, Jack. But turned into land—broad acres—woodland—you follow me, boy?"

"What could be clearer or more logical, sir?"

"Think so?"

"Certainly."

"Well, Jack, when I made the proposal to Lindley—when I showed him that the girl's guardian was ready to force her on him—what do you think he said?"

"Thanked God and you, sir, of course."

"Ah? You'd do that, Jack. You have enough sense to do that. So would any normal boy. But not he! 'Has rather an odd name,' says the supercilious young—damn me, Jack, I go mad when I think of it!"

"Well, sir," said Lynmouth, "one has to consider other things. Perhaps she is much older than he——"

"Not a whit! Not a whit! Younger, I'd say, if anything could be younger than that fool of a boy!"

"Then she was probably crooked and crippled, sir; though even then, one should look at the soul more than the body—and look at the good of the estate, too!"

"By heaven, Jack, it warms my heart to hear you. Actually warms my heart and makes me young again. Shows me how right all my conclusions have been. But I tell you that the girl that Lindley scorned and badgered and disgraced himself before was that beautiful and charming young woman, Halcyone Tiverton!"

"Impossible!" cried the righteous Lynmouth.

"True, though! Impossible, but true!"

Swelling emotion seemed to choke the honest breast of Lynmouth. He walked up and down the room for a moment, and paused at the window, letting the colonel see his manly profile, knitted in wrath and in disgust.

"I see you understand," said the colonel. "But not all! Dream of fifteen years, lad! Moment that the judge became her guardian, he popped the plan to me. Let Halcyone grow up. Keep her away from Lindley. And when the time was ripe, then pop them together, and put the opportunity in front of Lindley. If he didn't faint with joy, he'd ask her to marry him as soon as he had his breath and his mental balance again!

"And what's the result? 'Odd name—Halcyone,' says the young puppy, and promptly gets drunk in her presence."

"Very hard to believe, sir," said Lynmouth, in a stifled

voice of honest indignation. Stifled with real emotion, too, for now he was seeing the glorious possibilities that might flow out of this conversation.

"It *is* hard to believe," agreed the colonel. "Think of it from the viewpoint of the judge, too. No children. Nothing to live for except building up the estate of this girl. Million and a half, barely, fifteen years ago. But he built the thing up and made it grow with careful investing. Masterpiece of labor and thought and care, I tell you. Glorious thing. And always pointing towards the day when he could hand that girl and her millions, and all his own money as well to my grandson and simply lift him into a grand position on a wave of affluence!"

"A beautiful—a beautiful scheme!" cried Jack Lynmouth, his head thrown back and his voice trembling with enthusiasm.

"Any fool could see its beauty. Any fool saving one; 'Odd name, Halcyone,' says he. Ten thousand damnations! Not to be believed though it's sworn to! And then to make himself grovellingly drunk before her. Faugh! Faugh! What a girl, too!"

"A beautiful girl—a girl to make a wife and a mother," said Lynmouth. He added with stern virtue: "But that's not the point at issue. If she were grayheaded, bent, sick, crippled, what is of importance is the fifteen years of work and thought that you and Judge Postlethwaite have poured into this idea. And that idea to be blasted and thrown aside—why, I'm sorry for Lin. I thought better of him than this!"

"Yes, yes!" cried the colonel. "You understand, then,

what I am about to say? The idea has not yet been discarded!"

Mr. Lynmouth lowered his balance to the floor, lest the colonel should see the fire in his eyes.

"I'm glad of that," he declared. "I'm glad that you think you can bring Lindley to terms."

"Lindley? No! Put wine in a leaking bottle? Only once! No, Jack, the thing has to be entrusted to another person. Another man must be found. Another Bister!"

"I thought, sir," said Lynmouth, "that Lin was the last of the line."

"Ha? Tell me, is he more of a Bister than you?"

There was a pause—a long pause. Mr. Lynmouth had grown pale.

"Speak out!" said the colonel. "Your name is John Bister Lynmouth, I hear. What would it cost your self-love to chop off the last part of that name and make it plain Bister? Plain John Bister!"

Convention was no mighty master so far as Lynmouth was concerned, but now he could not help breaking out: "What would people say?"

"Damn the people! The idea is the thing, as you said yourself. How does it appeal to you? Or do you feel a Lynmouth is too good to chance to a Bister, eh? Out with it!"

There were strong reasons against it. People might shrug their shoulders for a few years at a man who changed his name for the sake of an estate. But there were reasons for it. Bister Hall was one solid and potent reason. And there were seven million reasons beside, all small in themselves but overwhelming in the total.

Young Mr. Lynmouth started and then gripped the hand of the colonel.

"Sir," said he, "I feel that you are old enough and wise enough to guide me. I follow you with my eyes shut. Use me for whatever you will!"

CHAPTER XV

A SINGLE-MINDED man cannot keep two great thoughts at once. So it was with Bister, for though he knew that his position at the Hall and in the affections of the colonel had been shaken to the ground, there was another idea so glorious and all-embracing that it promptly swept into a corner of his brain the suspicion which he held against Lynmouth and the quarrel which he had had with his grandfather: he went out to Mistral, and found the gray stallion grazing in a pasture behind the stables, with young Lefty perched on the top rail of the lofty fence, whittling aimlessly at a stick of wood. So cunningly is man compounded by Mother Nature, that his most crucial sins are apt to be those dearest to his heart. So it was that Bister could look on the horse and feel that its beauty was a sufficient balance against all the happinesses in the world. Tod Loomis, gloomy and long of face, drew near. What was to be done with the big horse?

"He has to go," said Bister, remembering the ultimatum of the colonel. "You look pleased, Tod?" he added.

"I am," admitted Tod. "Two wrong don't make a right. And the pair of 'em are as wrong as they can be; Mistral is a devil, and yet he's better than the thing on the fence!"

Bister, regarding the bunched back of the boy, consented in his soul that Lefty was a very bad tool to use

for such difficult work as that which lay before him. And with a little outburst of despair he said: 'Tell me, Tod. No hope for the big fellow?"

"Takes six months to know a man," said Loomis, "and it takes a year to know a horse; because they talk a different language. But I'd say that Mistral is done for. Maybe for breeding. I don't know."

He gave his reasons, and with an aching heart Bister listened. An outlaw horse is an outlaw forever, Loomis vowed. They are like tigers, which may be trained to do a few tricks, but the trainer dares not turn his back on them. It might even be possible to work up the gray for straight races on the track. But certainly he never could be trusted for cross-country work, where the horse must be as true and faithful as any human friend.

"You're right," nodded Bister, at the finish. "But you can't expect a man to give up the minute he sees that he hasn't a chance of winning. I'm going to bulldog the thing through, for a while. Where can I put up Mistral? Some place as near as possible."

"Try old Crofter. He has a couple of good fences that ought to hold Mistral."

"Crofter knows nothing about horses."

"There's Divine, then, though he's a full mile away."

"Just the distance for a brisk gallop. I'll ask Divine. Tell Lefty to follow on with the horse."

So the roadster roared out of the driveway, again, and shot from the main thoroughfare down a long, winding, humpbacked lane until Bister saw before him a little white house on the shoulder of a hill, with a bit of second-growth forest bending in the wind around it, and

a glistening line of laundry snapping and fluttering at one side.

He was glad that he was not on the back of Mistral, facing that flickering line of white!

Over by the woodshed, a red-shirted man stood up and waved to him, so Bister ran the car into the driveway and dismounted. Mike Divine, followed by a long-legged game chicken, approached him. He was a bandy-legged, broad little man, who had been a jockey in his youth and who had never stopped mourning the career which increasing pounds had blocked.

"You haven't given up this stuff, I see," said Bister as they shook hands, and he pointed to the game rooster. "I thought you'd promised the judge that you'd give up raising these fighting little devils?"

"Sure I have, sir," said Mike Divine. "It ain't in me to lie to a kind, good man like Judge Morrissey. But ye see how it is, Mr. Lindley. I got so used to the game birds that it wasn't natural without 'em. So I just kept on Highstepper for the sake of companionship."

"Not for fighting, then?" asked Bister.

"Fightin'?" said the Irishman. "It's a low business, sir. A damned low business. Everything that the judge said about it was said true. Low and brutal and mean. No, sir, I'm through with the game and I never would of taken it up except that some of the gentlemen had to have their sport; and I got to make a living, sir."

This speech flowed with wonderful unction and smoothness from the tongue of Divine.

"Come, come!" murmured Bister. "Do you mean to say that sometimes at night you don't take a few birds

over to one of the barns on some old place, where a party of good fellows get together to watch the fun? With a couple of hooded lanterns to give you light enough?"

"Sir," said Divine, looking at him a little wistfully, "is it for information or for sport that you're askin' me?"

"Information, Mike. Information!"

"No, by God," declared Mike with warmth. "I wouldn't do no such sneakin' thing, at all."

"That's rather too bad," said Bister. "For I know a fellow up the country who's interested in your birds ——"

"You do, sir? And what might be his name?"

At this moment, there was a bit of cackling, and through a hole which she had scratched beneath a shed, a game-hen made her way, followed by a long string of chickens.

"Hello, Mike!" cried Bister. "I can't believe my eyes. Or have all those birds just come over to pay a call? You're not raising them, surely?"

"I ask you, now!" cried Mike Divine, with greater heat than ever. "Would you have a poor bird go draggin' on a miserable, wifeless, unmarried, bachelor condition, would you? No, Mr. Lindley, but I got him a wife; and God sent along all the little gamies in due time."

"Later on," suggested Bister, "maybe he'll send you a few brothers and cousins."

"Leave good enough alone, sir," grinned the Irishman. "Now what was you sayin' about some up-countryman?"

"He didn't think much of your birds—no, nor of you, either!"

"Hell and fire," cried Divine. "Does he own one of the things?"

"He has a few birds. He said that he'd like to match one of them against your best."

"I'll match him," said Divine, "and after my bird has pecked out the brain of his, I'll take on the master with my own hands. What'll he put up? Did he give you a side bet?"

"To me?" said Bister, shocked. "Why, Mike, I knew you too well for that. I told him that my friend Divine was a law-abiding man, and that he'd given up the breeding and the fighting of game cocks."

"You did? Did you tell him that?" said Divine, groaning and chafing. "But where does he live, man?"

"I wouldn't be tempting you, Mike."

"For the love of God, sir!"

"You wouldn't let a match grow out of this?"

"Never, sir. Never! Let you help to break the law? Never, by God and St. Patrick!"

"What, Mike, you wouldn't let me have a seat at the show? Is that friendship?"

"Seat?" cried Mike. "You and all your friends can come, God knows, to any show that ever I'll stage. D'ye hear me, sir? Right down in front by the edge of the ring I'll have a place for you where ye can see the blood fly!"

"You're a rare one, Mike," said Bister, smiling. "The fellow's name is Lewis and he lives in Chester."

"Ah, don't I know the lopsided mug! I'll kill the best bird that he ever raised, and then I'll give him a wallop that'll straighten his face for him! Lewis, eh? He

don't think much of me and my birds! Sir, it was kind of you to drop by and tell me. Would you be steppin' in? I got a drop of real good old stuff that's been mellowin' and thickenin' and ripenin' and sweetenin' all these years since the good old days when we was a free country, Mr. Lindley."

"Afterwards," said Bister, nodding. "But now, can you keep a horse for me? It's a bad one that the colonel doesn't want on the place. It's the gray stallion that Dick Bunce bought and was wrecked by. It's Mistral, Mike."

At this news, Mike Divine gasped like one of his pet game-chickens, and then he teetered back and forth and beat his hands together.

"*Can* I keep him?" cried Mr. Divine. "Can anybody else keep him half so good, sir? And ain't that the beauty comin' flashin' down the road, now?"

For in fact, Lefty was now in sight, and the sun winked on the glossy back of the stallion as on the surface of a mirror.

CHAPTER XVI

They put the gray in a breaking corral surrounded by a nine-foot fence, a relic of the ex-jockey's golden days. "Not that any horse could jump that high," explained Divine, "but to keep silly ideas out of the heads of the darlin's."

"That's Lefty," explained Bister, pointing to the lad where he sat in a lump on the top rail of the fence and looked down at his charge. "He has the horse hypnotized, and therefore has to stay with him."

Divine, having examined Lefty with some care, remarked that no good ever came of bad medicine. However, it might be as well to keep him on for a time; he himself would soon have the stallion eating out of his hand, he declared.

"Will you?" asked Bister, leaning against a post of the corral. "I don't think so, Mike. This is Prince Regent stuff, and when it goes bad, it stays bad for a long time, you know. But if——"

"Look out!" shouted Mike Divine, and Bister leaped away from the fence just as the stallion rushed at him and thrust his head between the bars.

But having missed, the big horse flung himself back into the corral and plunged wildly here and there, as though trampling or tearing some invisible enemy.

"I rode him a bit this morning," explained Bister, very grave. "You see that he remembers me!"

"I see," nodded Divine. "I've seen 'em bad, but I never seen no worse than that. More like a cat, than a horse. Look at him now with his back turned, pretendin' to graze, but all the while he's only watchin' you and prayin' that you'll come closer."

"Look him over," said Bister, and sat down on a box with an aching heart, to stare. The Irishman presently came back.

"Oh, ay," said Divine. "Oh, ay! He's a horse! Is he made, though?"

"Never sat anything that fenced half as well."

"There's only two ways," pronounced Mike Divine. "You can beat 'em with force, and you can win 'em with love. Love would do no good with that tiger-cat. Force is the thing, sir! Beat him to a pulp. Kid!"

"Are you talkin' to me, fatty?" asked Lefty, partly turning his head.

Divine wheeled on Bister.

"Are you raisin' that young imp to use his tongue like that?" he demanded.

"I haven't raised him," admitted Bister. "He's raised himself. What do you want to ask him?"

"Sir," said Mike satirically, addressing himself to Lefty again. "Would you mind tellin' us, is this horse a fence-hugger?"

"Him?" said Lefty, yawning and disclosing a set of yellow fangs. "Naw, he don't have to!"

"If he ain't," said Divine, "then the thing to do is to ride him out in that corral. Are you up to it?"

"Well, I'll try," consented Bister. "I brought some saddles over in the car. Lefty, throw one on Mistral."

Lefty slowly obeyed, dragging the saddles with trailing stirrups from the roadster, and then crawling through the fence. He sat down cross-legged and took the saddle on his knees.

"Hurry, lad, hurry!" called Bister impatiently.

"Hurry don't lead you nowhere with Mistral," replied the lad. "He'll notice me pretty soon."

Divine stirred with anger; but Bister checked him. Through a long moment they waited, but at length Mistral came cautiously and sniffed the saddle with ears laid back. For his convenience, the boy turned it slowly so that the stallion could examine it in detail. Only when this tedious ceremony was completed did Lefty rise and take Mistral by the mane. But the gray was off in an instant, rearing high.

"Watch yourself!" called Bister.

With that peril literally hanging above his head, Lefty calmly turned his back upon the stallion. "Aw, it ain't nothin'," remarked Lefty. "He kids me like this, now and then!"

And in fact the descending hoofs of Mistral missed the youngster, and then the horse swept around the corral in a dizzy circle which came to a stop when, with planted hoofs, the gray halted suddenly before Lefty, snorting and stamping.

Twice and again that ceremony was repeated, and it was half an hour before the saddle was on the back of the big fellow. There was another interval almost as long before he would accept the bridle, after which, Lefty tethered him short to a post and climbed back to the top rail to watch.

"And if you didn't have me," remarked Lefty, yawning again, and tilting his head to watch a distant hawk in the sky, "and if you didn't have me, it'd be a three-man job, I'm tellin' you."

They could take the truth of that for granted. During almost an hour, the two had been watching, speechless with interest.

"You can see what's wrong," diagnosed Mike Divine. "Too many brains. Sure, that's it. Good horse is like a good woman; her man does her thinkin' for her. You take a woman that thinks for herself, and she goes wrong pretty quick and stays wrong. Got a girl that way. Old man's head ain't good enough for her. She's got to do her thinkin' for herself. Well, she'll see what comes of it! Same with Mistral. Can't use blinders on him. He's got to see. And the more he sees the more he can't understand; and the more he can't understand, the more nervouser he gets. I dunno, Mr. Lindley, but I think that you're gunna have a handful!"

With his head tied short, the stallion could do little, and accordingly, Bister was able to drop on his back from the high fence, but once the rope was untied, Mistral illustrated his name. Bucking at every jump, like a storm wind he hurtled around the corral. It was a spacious affair, big enough to accommodate a dozen wild colts, but the stride of Mistral turned the ground space into nothing at all. Twice Bister lost a stirrup, and twice he regained it again by sheer luck and pluck. Then Mistral began to spin like a top.

The finest rider in the world, if he has a perfect seat and grip when such spinning begins, may hold his place

for a minute or so. But Bister had neither, and presently he was hurled from the saddle like a stone from the hand. He struck a lower bar and rolled through to the outside of the corral with the snaky gray head reaching furiously after him.

Bister came staggering to his feet.

"I'd give him up, Mr. Lindley," said Mike Divine. "I'd just turn him out in the pasture where you can have an eyeful of his good looks, now and then."

One of his hands steadied Bister; in the other he grasped a pitchfork which he had picked up from the ground and brandished in the excitement of the fray.

But Bister, wiping blood from his lips, was already studying the stallion with a glassy eye.

"I'm going to take another whirl with him," he announced, drawing his belt tighter. "He had me off balance when he began that whirling—but he won't have me off-balance again! I'll nail him this time, confound him. I'll ride him or——"

"Don't do it, sir!" said a trembling voice in the background. "Love a God, love a God, don't do it, sir. He'll kill you, sure, and he'll smash your pretty face to bits, Mr. Lindley."

Mrs. Divine, her moist hands rubbing her kitchen apron, had come out to watch.

"Go back where you belong!" bellowed Mike Divine. "Is there gunna be two in my house that I can't manage? Go back in your kitchen, where a decent woman belongs. Moving pictures and the vote, that's what ruins ye! Mr. Lindley, will you listen to me, sir, and not——"

"Let me be, Mike," insisted Bister, a bit unsteady but

resolute as a rock. "Let me be, and help me snub him to the post again. I'm going to master him, if he's the devil on stilts!"

"You see?" shouted Mike Divine after the fat, retreating back of his wife. "You see what you've done with your damned interferin'? Ah, God, sir, don't you be doin' it! I can feel sorrow and misery in it. It's a black day. A black day! if there's something happens to you, sir, I'll sell out and leave this cursed place!"

"Are you going to admit that one horse can beat two men?" asked Bister coldly.

"No," cried Mike Divine. "Beat us? We can tie him in knots—well, if you want one more whirl at him, why not?"

It was no easy thing to catch the stallion again, even in that corral; for Lefty refused to lend a hand.

"If I mix in," said Lefty judicially, "he'll be apt to think that I'm helpin' on the foolishness. Which I ain't! I've give him to you once, saddled and bridled, and tied short to a post, and if that ain't a day's work—you try to get any other one man to do the same for you!"

He would not budge, but at length Divine threw a long noose over the head of the big horse, and in that fashion they got his neck against a post once more, and Bister dropped again into the saddle. There followed five such minutes as rarely are seen. Twice the stallion spun like a top and twice Bister kept his seat, and again and again, the gray giant hurled himself on his back and then strove to roll on his rider; but every time Bister leaped clear. And then Mistral began a trick which generally is confined to artful mustangs of the Far West. He threw him-

self high in the air, and came down upon one stiffened foreleg, which had on his rider the effect of a hammer blow on the base of the spine, and then a whip-snap finish—his head and neck supplying the part of the whiplash!

Blood burst from the nose and the mouth of Bister; he reeled in the saddle.

"Kill him! Kill the gray devil before he kills Mr. Lindley!" gasped the Irishman. "Betsy, Betsy, you fool of a woman! Bring me the rifle! The rifle, d'ye hear?"

There was no time for the bringing of a rifle. Betsy rushed from the house with the gun in her hand, yelling copious advice; but in the next moment Bister was pitched from his seat and fell a senseless body against the fence at the very feet of Divine.

That alone saved him—the lucky accident which hurled him at that exact spot—for when Mistral rushed in to finish his victim, Divine met him with the pitchfork, thrusting savagely. There was less passion than wisdom in Mistral, and he held back until Mrs. Divine could draw the unconscious form from the corral.

Lefty had not stirred from his place on the upper rail. Neither did he stir now, when Divine yelled to him to help carry his master into the house.

"I'm a groom, I ain't no damned valet," said the amiable Lefty, and he shrugged his shoulders at the curses which Mike Divine threw after him.

There he remained, laughing a little, now and then, a sneering laughter, until Mistral came and sniffed at his knees and pricked his short, silken ears.

"Don't you worry, old son," said the boy, "He'll come

back for more and you'll have another chance at him. The others was fools, but this one—he's a *damned* fool."

This fool, so specially qualified, now lay on a mattress on the kitchen floor of the Divine house. Mrs. Divine would have placed him in the parlor, but her spouse would not hear of it.

"There ain't anything as cheerful as a kitchen," he declared. "More power to the stove and the smell of that applesauce that you're stewin', Betsy dear. When the lad begins to come around, it'll do him more good than doctors."

"Aw, Mike, Mike," sobbed Mrs. Divine. "He'll be dyin' on us. O God, if he ain't dead now!"

"Now will ye shut up?" asked her husband cruelly. "And if ye had the half of an eye, couldn't ye see that there's blood still runnin' out of his nose? Does a dead man bleed?"

"Ay, bleedin' to death. And you so calm like a fool, with his heart's blood drainin' away. God punish ye, Mike Divine!"

"Woman, woman, will ye madden me? Who studied veterinary for a year and more?"

"Is a horse a man? I only ask you just that, Mike Divine!"

"Is a horse a woman, I ask you back? Stop talkin'—stop talkin'—you start my brains rattlin' like peas in a sieve! Reach me that bottle. The words of you would drive any man to the need of strong liquor. There, take a sip yourself. Lemme look to the body. Thank God he ain't died while you had me blind with your talkin' and foolishness."

"Whisht! Give him to me, the darlin'. Look at the sweet smile of him, wakin' up—oh, Mike, why could you not of given me a son?"

"Mr. Bister! Mr. Lindley!" cried Mike, shaking the semi-conscious youth by the shoulder.

"Are ye mad, Mike?" cried the wife.

"Well, Mike, what's happened?" said Bister faintly.

"Mr. Lindley, will you listen to the crazy woman askin' me why didn't I give her a son? Is it my place to be givin' you a son? Or is it a right that a man has to expect from his wife? Whose fault is it? A man supplies the house and lot and the groceries and the meat, and the woman supplies the family. Am I wrong? Ain't it in the Bible? By God, Mr. Lindley, the kind of talk that I hear in me own house is drivin' me crazy as a loon!"

"Don't mind him," said Mrs. Divine, supporting Bister on her brown and massive arm. "Don't be after hearin' him at all, sir. Just blatherin'. Just blatherin', sir. Thank God your back ain't busted. Is your head all right? Well I remember little Charlie O'Rourke lying with a white smile on his face for a month before he died—after the beast of a cartwheel had run over his darlin' back. Oh, my heart! Reach me the bottle, Mike, dear. Taste it, sir, and don't you fear! Drink you deep. Whisht! Does it make you cough so?"

"It's the damn gin and orange juice and lemon and ginger ale that the quality drink that tears the throats out of them," declared Mr. Divine sadly. "But whisky, that never done a harm in the world, it's never had, ex-

cept with water or fizz that a dog would turn up his nose at it. Try it again, sir. Sure, it'll warm the soul of you fine, in a minute! Fetch a dish of the applesauce, Betsy. Maybe that'll hearten him. The poor lad, maybe his stomach is empty, too!"

CHAPTER XVII

The doctor who declared that Colonel Bister would have to spend at least four more days in bed was glad to leave the house, though his ears tingled long afterwards. It left the head of Bister Hall to lie on his back and watch the ceiling, and the trailing afternoon shadows that gradually changed the face of it. There is nothing more conducive to thought, and the colonel twisted his moustaches and grew alternately hot and cold in his mind, alternately bitter and sad.

"I'll give him another chance!" said the colonel at last.

"Yes, sir," said Chance.

"Confound you," cried the colonel. "What d'ye mean by sneaking into a room in this fashion, Chance?"

"Why, sir, I was only——"

"Don't explain yourself. I don't want explanations. I want order and obedience. Get Mr. Lynmouth here at once."

Chance slipped from the room and the colonel, feeling much better, lighted a cigar and began to blow little puffs of smoke into the air. The strings of his tense spirit began to loosen; he was even humming a little beneath his breath when Lynmouth finally arrived.

"Sit down, Jack, sit down," said the colonel. "I've been thinking over our little chat."

"Yes, sir," answered Lynmouth, a trifle anxious.

"One thing I mustn't forget is the youth of Lindley. Tremendously young. That's some excuse, eh?"

"It cuts me to the quick," said the generous Lynmouth, "to think of any trouble coming to him."

"I know it does, my dear Jack," replied the colonel, dividing a ring of smoke with an accurate hand. "I know it does. And that's why I've determined to give the rascal a new chance—a final chance. With your permission, Jack, because I've already pledged myself to you. But, you understand how it is? He won't have to operate on his name in order to appear as a Bister, eh?"

It was early evening. The window was bright but the room already was dusky, and the colonel could not see the face of Mr. Lynmouth as the latter answered with wonderful readiness: "I've no greater desire in the world than to see Lindley installed here as the proper master of Bister Hall, in due time, sir!"

"Give me your hand," said the colonel. "No matter what may happen, no doubt ever may enter my mind about you hereafter. You're a thoroughly good fellow, Jack. The true stuff is in you; the right Bister strain. Step yonder and fill your glass from that decanter, Jack, and——"

"Beg pardon, sir. I never drink—except a taste after dinner, now and then."

"Ha? Not drink?" exclaimed the colonel. "Not drink? Why, damn it, how does that come? Well, well, well! Perhaps some people can keep their hearts warm without the stuff."

He pressed the button and Chance appeared at once.

"Get Mr. Lindley," commanded the master of the house. "Bring the scoundrel up here at once, Chance."

The valet disappeared and the colonel continued: "Did you see his face when I gave that order, Jack?"

"No, sir."

"Lighted up like a Fourth of July evening. Loves Lindley. They all love him. Since he was big enough to walk, he's given them so damned much trouble that they've had to think of him every day. For twenty years, every time there's been a smash or a crash in the house, they shout: 'It's Mr. Lindley!' and start for him. In that entire time, I know the graceless puppy never has said thank you to them once; and still they love him. That villain Chance neglects me day and night to wait on my grandson. But I'll be even with him! I won't remember Chance in my will. No, not for a copper, confound his smug face!"

In this manner the colonel conversed to the shadowy and blackening silhouette of Lynmouth until Chance returned with his soft step. Mr. Lindley had not been found.

"Don't lie to me, Chance!" exclaimed the colonel. "You've found him down in the wine cellar sampling old brands with Darley, eh? Is that it? A pair of you bring him up to me by the nape of the neck. I'll make an example of him. And I'll discharge Darley on the spot!"

"No, sir," said Chance. "Mr. Lindley went off hours ago with his groom and Mistral, and they haven't been seen, since."

"Mistral? He went off riding Mistral?" said the colonel hoarsely, and fell back on his pillow.

"No, sir. He drove in his roadster and left the boy to follow, leading the horse. I believe that he intended to go to the house of Mike Divine to put up Mistral there."

"Is he mad?" boomed the colonel, heaving a great breath of relief. "Is he out of his wits? Isn't there pasture and stable room for the vicious beast here? And if—no, no, no! I forgot. Mistral is not to be kept on the place. Completely forgot. Well, send over and get the boy back here at once. I want to talk with him."

"Yes, sir," murmured Chance, and started through the door.

"You're full of the true Christian charity, sir," said Jack Lynmouth.

"Charity? Hold on, Chance!" cried the colonel. "Charity? Well, am I to teach the young scapegrace to knock me down and walk on me? No, by heaven, I have to keep a tight rein with him. And a tight rein I shall keep!"

He made a pause, breathing hard, and glaring at his valet and Lynmouth.

"Don't send to Divine's," said the colonel. "We'll wait till the bad penny rolls home again."

It seemed as though Chance was actually about to express an opinion of his own, but the colonel thundered to him to be off, and Chance vanished. "You see how it is, Jack," said the colonel mournfully, "they spoil Lindley. He can't do anything wrong, in their eyes. If he knocked them down and ran over them, they'd get up laughing. They'll make a villain of that boy!"

"May I ask who Darley is, sir?" said Lynmouth.

"Darley? Darley? Oh, the cook, of course."

"Indeed?" said Lynmouth.

"What of it?"

"Nothing, sir. Yet it seems a little odd. Could Lindley ever sit in the cellar drinking with—the cook, sir?"

"Ha? The cook? The greasy scoundrel knows more foolish old songs than you'd credit, my boy. Lindley plays his guitar and Darley sings; and they knock off the heads of my best wine bottles and turn them upside down between choruses. A low vice, Jack. Wouldn't you call that a low vice?"

Lynmouth kept silent for some moments.

"Well, Jack?" asked the colonel again in some irritation. "Why don't you answer me?"

"I can't with any delicacy criticize Lindley," said Jack with the utmost gravity. "And I trust that such stories as this don't get about the countryside."

"From the house? Tush! The servants would tear out their tongues by the roots rather than wag them about my boy. Never fear for their chatter. It's only the follies of Lindley away from home that are noised about. God knows, they're thick enough!"

"It may turn out well in the end," said Jack sadly. "In the meantime, it's hard on you, sir, to see the Bister name——"

"What about the Bister name?"

"Dragged into cellars!" said Jack. "And smirched in wayside taverns with thick-shinned, filthy workingmen for companions——"

"Hello!" cried the colonel. "That's an odd tone, young man!"

"It is," replied Lynmouth, throwing back his noble head. "But I can't help it, sir. After all, I'm a Bister in all but name, and to whom can I speak my mind freely if not to the head of our house?"

The colonel had stiffened with wrath, but now he slowly relaxed.

"True," said the colonel. "True, Jack. You have the right to speak. And I'll listen, by God, with all my heart to you. Another man might have flown into a passion, just now, but by the grace of heaven, I've been given self-control and an even temper. There is a touch of the old Attic spirit in me, somewhere. May have been gotten out of the classics when I was in school. Nothing too much, you know. However that may be, I hate excess. And so I've controlled myself this time, and I'll control myself again. Tell me whatever is in your mind against Lindley."

"I've said enough and too much," declared the younger man. "But the thing burst out of me against my will. I haven't your perfect mental poise, sir."

"No, Jack, you haven't," said the colonel. "But you'll learn as you grow older. The great point is to think twice. I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to send a bullet through some fool, and found that a caning would serve the turn almost as well. Violence is to be abhorred, Jack. But as you stay here with me, I'll try to give you some lessons in self-control. I was a bit hasty in my youth. Just a trifle. That made me determined to

master myself. Command yourself before you attempt to command others. I watched myself with a rigorous eye. And in amazing short time I had the upper hand. You'll learn to do the same, perhaps."

"I'll make a study of it, sir," said Jack Lynmouth. "It seems to me that you've given me an invaluable hint!"

"Do you, Jack? Matter of fact, I've said the same thing fifty times to Lindley, but the puppy yawns and looks out the window. I tell you what, my lad, there's stuff in you—and with the proper training we're going to make a big man of you! Where the devil is Lindley?"

He grew more and more querulous as the evening turned to night, and when the dinner hour arrived, he was crimson with emotion.

"Won't have you wait dinner five minutes," shouted the colonel. "By heaven, I see what it is. The dog thinks that he'll frighten me into submission by staying away with his cursed horse—send for Chance!"

Chance was instantly at hand.

"Chance," said the colonel, "run to Lindley's room and see if all his clothes are there——"

"They are, sir," said Chance.

"Are you sure? How can you be sure?"

"I made a careful search an hour ago."

"Good lad, Chance; how could I manage without you? Jack!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Do you think that he's been on the back of Mistral again and that he's been thrown—savaged—ah, God defend him!"

"No slightest danger of that," said Lynmouth. "He's

been on the back of Mistral once to-day. It was the first time, and I think that it will be the last time, unless the manners of the stallion change a little."

Here Chance turned a trifle, so that his impersonal gaze could rest on Lynmouth.

"Perhaps you're right," said the colonel, in a half-groaning voice. "But one never can tell with that tiger cat of a boy. He'll get himself killed. He *asks* for death with tears in his eyes. The precious young fool! Chance!"

"Sir?"

"Get Loomis. Half a dozen of you take rifles. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you shoot straight?"

"You taught me, sir."

"So I did. Slow but sure. I remember. Half a dozen of you go to Divine's place, find Mistral, and shoot the beast. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Scatter, the lot of you! Are you going, Jack? Come back after dinner—and—Jack, you might go along with Chance!"

In the hall, Mr. Lynmouth turned with a vast concern to the valet.

"Are you going to start on that errand?" asked Lynmouth. "Going to invade the private property of a man and shoot down a horse which——"

"No, sir," said Chance coldly. "We're not going to do as Colonel Bister desires; we'll hope that the matter will blow out of his mind in a few minutes. Or we could say

that we started, and found too many people near the barn."

"You have an extraordinary head on your shoulders, Chance," said Lynmouth heartily.

"You're very kind, sir," said the valet.

Lynmouth found himself looking into a face of ice. "That's all," he nodded, but as Chance moved away, Mr. Lynmouth went thoughtfully towards his own room. It was the first serious check which he had met—if, after all, one can consider the displeasure or suspicion of a hired servant a check.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHILE these matters were passing upstairs in the room of the colonel, there was a similar excitement below in the kitchen quarters where Darley, the swarthy-faced chef who looked like a pirate and cooked like an angel, had gathered in his little private "office" the main heads of the Bister household. There were the dignified Gregory, staunch as oak and hardly more flexible; Tod Loomis, whose eyes always squinted a little, from his constant habit of peering into the souls of horses; and Chance himself from time to time, as he came down to report the progress of the scene which was progressing in the chamber of the master of the house.

If Mr. Lynmouth could have sent his spirit into this secret council, he would have been more alarmed, and certainly far more enraged, particularly at a moment well before the end when Chance slipped into the cook's sanctum and advanced with a white face to the center table. The cook, who had been a sailor and a mutineer as well, gave one glance at the valet and straightway poured out a large dram of a stinging amber liquor. Mr. Chance poised this in his hand and pronounced slowly, in a voice not his own:

" 'In the meantime it's hard, sir, to see the Bister name dragged into cellars and smirched in wayside taverns with thick-skinned, filthy workingmen for companions ____' "

He proceeded no farther, for the cook struck a cleaver into a chopping block with such a heavy hand that the whole room quivered a little.

"Did he say that?" asked Darley, his mouth working until his moustaches lifted and fell like the quills of a porcupine. "Did he say that? The low————"

There followed a flow of singular epithets, gathered from the forecastle of a tramp to the jerk-line of a desert caravan. The others took no offense but listened with a sort of intelligent interest and at the end the noble and placid face of Gregory betrayed the faintest of smiles.

"There are times," said he, "there are times, Darley, when one cannot help envying you your travels!"

Chance had whisked off his drink and waved aside the glass of water which the cook pushed towards him.

"He's gunna say something more!" said Darley in a husky murmur. "Look at it come!"

For the far-off expression still hung in the eyes of Chance like a mist:

" 'After all,' quoted Chance, 'I'm a Bister in all but name, and to whom can I speak my mind freely if not to the head of our house?' "

" 'Our' house?" burst from Gregory. " 'Our house?' "

"The snake!" said Tod Loomis. "If he loses a stirrup the next time his horse jumps, and breaks his neck in a ditch, may God forgive me for it!"

Chance, without a word, held his glass for another dram, and received it.

"No," said the lofty Gregory, "it makes little difference how bitter we may feel, we'll take our bitterness out in talk in the kitchen; and no matter how we sharpen knives,

we'll never use them. If Mr. Lindley is put down—if he loses everything, including his home——"

"*I'll* cut the throat of the Malay swab!" growled Darley, with a dreadful grimace.

"No," said Gregory, with the manner of a judge sentencing his own son, "no, Darley, you were a free man once, but you're free no more. There's not one of us would dare to lift a hand or a voice to help Mr. Lindley. We would talk in the kitchen, but smile and bow and back around in the front of the house like well-trained machines—which we are, I presume, and no more."

"You speak for yourself," said Tod Loomis, sullenly.

Gregory took a glass of port delicately in his large but taper fingers.

"I speak for all men," said he, "who have lived soft too long. We have sold our souls. We have delivered up our right to be ourselves. I can remember a time when Gregory was a man; but for several decades at least he has been simply the stuffing in a uniform. I say that we'll do nothing."

"Gregory," said Chance, "you're always right; but this time you're wrong."

With that, he finished his second glass and passed from the secret room. A glance of awe followed him.

"He means it," said Tod Loomis. "I didn't think that there was that much heart in the man."

"He means it," echoed the cook. "What will *he* do?"

"What will *we* do," answered Tod Loomis. "That's the important thing. Upstairs is a rat gnawing his way into the heart of the colonel. And here we sit—here we sit! Hell of fire!"

He rose and stamped about the room.

"Hold on, Tod," said Gregory, "you're at a check, but that's no reason for riding down the hounds. Let us work. In the first place, we must get him back to the house."

"Man, man," said Loomis, "did you ever hear anyone say 'must' to Mr. Lindley?"

"Not of his equals," said the cook. "No, thank God, there ain't one of the lubbers with their holystoned decks and their clipper rigs that dares to cross him for fear of bein' run down. But I've hailed him. Ay, and I've boarded him and captured him, and I've hustled him out of the cellar and run him into the hall and slammed and locked the door in his face when he tried to get back at me!"

He sat with a smile of fierce joy, looking into the past, and rubbing his bristling black moustache.

"How many years ago was that?" asked Gregory coldly.

At this the cook started and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well," said he. "We've got some young lads on the place, and there's one of them that we could depend on for grit and power to get Mr. Lindley back."

"Do you mean Parsons?" asked Loomis.

"I mean McFarland."

"The jail bird?" queried Loomis with a sneer.

"Does the wearing of stripes ruin a man?" asked Darley savagely. "Why, hell, man, if I was to tell you where I learned to cook the pigeon stew that you like so much —well, I say McFarland is our boy. Would he die for Mr. Lindley?"

"What cur would not?" asked Gregory more coldly than ever. "What cur would not, after he has done what he has done?"

"It might be the best plan," declared Loomis. "It might be best to send McFarland. How could I go, for instance? I may be called for at any minute to give a description of how he took out Mistral and what he said and did."

A knock at the door.

"Who's that?"

"Mr. Darley, if you please, the chickens are sewed and stuffed."

"Then roast them, ye fool!" said Darley, with a roar like a sea lion's. "And how could I be leaving, with dinner cooking?"

"And of course," said Gregory," it is perfectly impossible for me to escape from the house at this hour. McFarland it had better be. Is he secret, though?"

"Ay, ay, ay!" said Darley with emphasis. "I can tell by the way that he looks at the floor after he's had a drink. He ain't any talker!"

"It's done," said Loomis, "It's done. I'll see McFarland straight off."

"Hold on," said Darley, as Loomis reached the door. "Suppose that he's been trying to ride Mistral again?"

"Damn your heart for supposin' it!" cried Loomis, and darted out.

At the stable he found a close consultation, carried on in whispering tones, with all heads huddled close together.

"What's this?" asked Loomis harshly. "A crap game, you blockheads?"

They scattered before him.

"Where's McFarland?"

"Out in the dark, there, Mr. Loomis."

In the dark before the stable, Loomis found McFarland walking up and down.

"Have you heard, Tim?" asked Loomis.

"Curse him!" said McFarland savagely. "I'd like to take out the heart of him. It'd be black, I tell you. Black as the middle of hell."

Tod Loomis lighted a cigarette, and by the flare of the match he saw all that he desired.

"Do you need hounds to take you on a line, Tim?" he asked.

"What are you blathering about now?" asked McFarland.

"Take a pull on that tongue of yours!" commanded Loomis haughtily.

"I'm fed up with Bister Hall," said Tim McFarland, "and fed up with you and the rest that stand by and fold your hands."

"And what about yourself, man? What'll you do?"

"Try me!" said McFarland. "Show me the thing to which I can put my hand, and try me!"

"Take that Whitney bay, then," said Loomis, "and get on the trail of Mr. Lindley. Try Divine's house first. You may pick up the scent there. But run it with your head up, man, and if you miss, cast far ahead. We've got hardly an hour to get him back."

"It's as short as that?"

"It is. The colonel has cut him off already; he's giving him a second chance; but unless he's back here before the night's well under way, that second chance will be lost. And it's the last. Another day, and that Lynmouth——"

"Ah, the traitor!" breathed McFarland.

"He'll have the colonel in the palm of his hand. We've got to get Mr. Lindley back now. If you find him with both legs broken, and savaged by that Mistral, take him in your arms, put him in the roadster, and bring him back anyway. And if anyone tries to stop you——"

"I'll kill the man that tries to stop me," said McFarland with a quiet assurance.

"Then get the bay—wait a minute. Thoms! Thoms!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Get the Whitney horse here in ten seconds with a saddle on him."

"Ay!"

"Now, Tim, if you manage to bring him back—in time, mind you—why, man, you haven't been at the top of the heap, here, as you know."

"I know it," growled McFarland. "I've been the cur dog in the pack ever since I came."

"But if you do this job, you'll be the king of it! Chance and Darley and even Gregory will be looking up to you. And you'll be better than a blood-brother to me. Here's the bay. And there's my hand, Tim. And God give you luck!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE Whitney bay was a strongheaded beast, not wicked, but fond of taking the bit and its own way across country; but this evening a hand of iron was on the reins. They flew the pasture fence, and headed straight for the distant house of Mike Divine. Half a dozen ditches and hedges lay between, which would make dangerous jumping in the black of the night, but a desperate rider makes a keen horse, and before they got to the second fence, man and mount were making the most of the starlight and their wits.

As they went over Croydon Hill, McFarland looked to the east and saw a thin-faced moon afloat in Borrogate Wood. Over his left shoulder, which meant the worst of bad luck! It chilled the heart of the young Irishman, but he steadied the bay at the next jump, and over the hedge they went with the ditch water on the farther side like a flash of steel beneath them. Then down the slope like the wind, with the Whitney horse jumping as though inspired, and now the lights of Divine's house before them.

Tim McFarland used no ceremony, but leaning from the saddle he thrust the door open and peered in. The atmosphere was thickened by the smoke of frying sausages, with a liberal assistance from pipes and cigarettes, but through the haze he made out Mrs. Divine tending the stove with a great toasting fork in her hand, Lefty in

a corner, the bulk of Clancy Muldoon, and Mike Divine standing by a mattress on which was stretched the heir presumptive of Bister Hall. The picture was rounded out by Kitty Divine, who sat beside Bister, fanning the smoke from his face and smiling at the world in general.

Of course she saw him first, and sang out: "Come in, Tim!"

McFarland, holding his reins at the end, stepped into the doorway and touched his hat to Bister.

"Are you bad hurt, sir?" he asked. "Was it Mistral?"

"Come in and sit down," said Bister. "Go on, Mike!"

"Well," said Mike," what would the vixen do but turn in the brake and make her point for the Random Woods? And then——"

McFarland dropped his reins over the doorknob and entered.

"May I have one word with you, sir?" said he.

"In a moment! In a moment!" said Bister. "We're in the thick of a story, Tim, but——"

"I'll have to speak to you one minute, sir," said McFarland.

"*Have* to."

"Sorry, sir."

"By heavens!" exclaimed Bister, "There's something wrong with the colonel. He's taken a bad turn. Speak out, Tim, in God's name!"

"The colonel ain't ailing," said Tim savagely. "But things is going on at the Hall, sir. And there's a need for you!"

"Look here," exclaimed Bister. "Gregory sent you on this silly errand, eh?"

"Gregory and Loomis and Chance and Darley, sir. They want you quick."

"If the four scoundrels are all in trouble," chuckled Bister, "they can wait till later. I'll pull them out of the fire then."

"The trouble ain't with them, sir."

"Not with them? And not with the colonel? It couldn't be Lynmouth; he's never in wrong."

"The trouble's with you, sir. It's your affair."

"There's no affair of mine," declared Lindley Bister, "that can't wait till the morning. Tim, sit down and forget my troubles, will you?"

McFarland rolled his eyes desperately from side to side, and then the weighty instructions of Loomis crowded into his mind.

"Mr. Lindley," said he, "are you strong enough to sit up?"

"Ay, Tim. What of it?"

"Then you must come with me!"

"Must?"

"Yes, sir, even if I have to carry you out to your car!"

"By gad—" began Bister. And then he leaned back in the pillows and laughed.

"Are ye mad, Tim?" asked Clancy Muldoon, his fat jowls quivering with wrath. "Are ye clean mad, boy? Tellin' Mr. Lindley what he must and what he must not do?"

"I am what I am," said Tim, in a rather heroic tone. "And I dunno that I see anyone here that's able to stop me from doin' my duty by Mr. Lindley. Not you nor Divine together, nor Mr. Lindley himself, on top of you!"

"You infernal, spavined, misbelievin', roach-backed, broken-kneed quitter!" bellowed Mike Divine. "I'll break you in two! I'll—leave go of me, Betsy. I'm gunna show him that——"

"Be quiet!" called Bister.

And the room fell silent, while he said softly to Kitty Divine: "Kitty, dear, none of the rest can handle the fool. Go smile him into a chair and a drink, will you?"

"As easy as *that*!" laughed beautiful Kitty, and straightway approached Mr. McFarland.

"You'll be having Mr. Lindley in a fever, Tim!" said she.

"And the lot of you'll be having him in a poorhouse," exclaimed McFarland.

"Ah? Is it as bad as that?" asked Kitty. "Tell me, Tim!"

Thus invited into her confidence, Tim merely shook his head, and growled: "I've done my talking, except to him. He comes with me if I got to sandbag him first!"

"Will you be trying force with a Bister?" she asked him. "Oh, Tim, where are the wits of you to-night—and you the smartest man in Borrogate, as everyone says! No, no! Let me do some persuading of him, will you?"

"Try your hand, Kitty. It's a desperate thing. And the minutes are flyin'!"

"Then sit down here and make yourself comfortable. Give me your hat. Here's a glass of something that'll warm your heart a little."

"Will you hurry with him, Kitty?"

"I will! I'll do my best. But you got to make haste

slowly with the Bisters. They won't be forced. Let me put your horse in the shed and give him a handful of oats; the poor thing'll be shivering——"

Away she went, leaving Tim with a brow still dark with purpose, so that he put the glass she had given him to one side.

In the meantime, Mike Divine, after another glowering glance at the intruder, was about to begin his story, when Bister said quietly: "Can you make him drink that, Mike?"

Mike forgot his frown and nodded with a grin. "Ain't he Irish?" said he, and straightway struck on with his tale.

"She kept through woods and broken country and the hounds after her, keeping a wonderful head, till we come to the first check at Addington village. We'd done twelve miles in less than an hour, and through country as thick as a horse-brush. The fox had gone right through the backyards of the town and we'd never have made a lucky cast and found him if it hadn't been for an Irishman that we met drivin' a cart and singin' Wearin' of the Green, because he seen the pink coats——"

"Good for him!" said Clancy Muldoon, shaking his fat face with pleasure.

"Ay, and here's drinkin' to him!" said Mike Divine. "Are you with us, Tim?"

Tim scooped up his glass with a flourish and poured away the contents.

"Ay," said he, as Kitty came back into the room, "I'm with you." He pulled his chair closer to the circle.

"Lay another plate for Tim," said Mr. Divine, to his spouse.

"No, no!" protested Tim, roused to a burning sense of duty. "I've got to go, and Mr. Lindley with me!"

Kitty leaned on the back of McFarland's chair.

"Aw, Tim," said she, "who'll thank you for takin' Mr. Lindley away and doin' him a mortal harm? He's too sick and dizzy to stand up!"

"Better to be sick and dizzy for a day," declared Tim, "than to be sick and dizzy for the rest of his life!"

"Suppose that a message was sent that he was too sick to go, Tim?"

Tim shook his head, but with less conviction. For when he looked at Bister, he saw such a pale, drawn face that he was much in doubt as to the advisability of carrying him out into the cold autumn night.

"Let him stay here and be comfortable," said the girl softly. "And stay yourself, Tim, to round out the party. Let that little rat, Lefty, carry the message for you!"

Tim, having hesitated, was lost. He drew Lefty to the side.

"Lefty," said he, "do you want to make a dollar?"

"It depends," said Lefty. "What you got in the pack?"

"Go up to Bister Hall and get to the colonel and tell him that Mr. Lindley is lying here sick from a fall. Make it as black as you please. You understand? Here's the money."

"Ay, yah!" yawned Lefty. "Soon as I've ate supper ——"

"Too late! Will you go now? Now or never, kid!"

It was a crisp, new bill that Lefty observed in the hand

of McFarland, and the newness of it turned the scale. "Gimme!" said he, and snatched the money. "I'll go," he said, slowly rising. "Shall I throw a scare into the colonel?"

"Yes; the bigger, the better."

So Lefty passed from the house, while Kitty Divine, returning to her place of chief nurse beside Bister, heard him say to her: "You've turned the trick, Kitty. I told you that he couldn't hold out if you smiled! Go on, Mike!"

So the destiny of Bister was committed, for the time being, to the narrow shoulders of Lefty. He did not carry it far, but having left the Divine house, by the light of the electric lamp at the next road-crossing he saw half a dozen youngsters of his own age shooting craps and joined them—just to see the dice show their faces a time or two. Dimes and quarters made up the bets, but the spirit of Lefty was of a larger and bolder variety. He placed his dollar against a point of five and—won! He placed the two dollars on a four and won again.

And all at once the rest of the world vanished. There remained for Lefty only the twinkling dice as they danced and turned. Time, also, was no more. And the minutes passed by tens; the hours drifted past. He had funds for a trip to the city and a splurge. The funds contracted to a new suit. They expanded to a horse. They shrank to a hat. They dwindled to his last quarter; they grew again; and the night turned old.

CHAPTER XX

Bister Hall was black and vast before them when Lindley Bister and McFarland drove slowly up to it, with the Whitney bay trotting at the side of the car. It was the cold, still hour of two, when thoughts of murder or murdering come most easily into the mind, and the cypress trees which bordered the lower driveway were melancholy figures of gloom.

"I can feel something in the air," said Bister, climbing out of the car with a shiver, and then sniffing the keen air. "And you haven't told me what brought you over to Divine's after me."

"Chance'll tell you," said McFarland. "He can tell you better than I can. But it's queer we didn't get a message back. I sent Lefty over with the news of why you hadn't come home."

"Come, come!" said Bister sharply. "Am I a child, perhaps? Do they have to put a time limit on me when I go out?"

The rear door opened as they approached. In the dimly lighted hall, Chance stood before them, his face seeming even whiter and more stony than usual.

"Did Lefty bring the news?" asked McFarland.

The cold eye of Chance turned on him and ran slowly up and down his body.

"No," said Chance, "Lefty didn't bring the news."

"God forgive me!" breathed Tim. "I'll have his heart out of him."

"Run along to bed, Tim," said Bister. "It isn't Tim's fault, Chance. I wouldn't come. Good-night, Tim."

The door was pushed slowly shut in the anguished face of Tim McFarland.

"You wanted me here, Chance?" asked the younger master.

"Yes, sir."

"McFarland was going to fight everyone at Divine's house and carry me off by force, but I wheedled him out of it. Did I do wrong?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't be hard on McFarland, though."

"No, sir, but I'm hard on myself. I never should have left such business to an ignorant, hulking——"

Chance set his teeth with a click.

"Now, what's happened?"

"Nothing, properly, that I can talk about. Except that Colonel Bister is so extremely angry that this time I don't think he'll get over it. In taking Mistral away and disappearing for the whole day, without leaving word behind of where you were going—and at this particular time—I can't say any more, sir. Except that I believe Colonel Bister will talk with you early in the morning."

That was the cold comfort that Bister took to bed that night. But after a moment or two of gloomy staring at the ceiling, he forgot the darkness of the future, remembered the shooting aches and pains in his body, and finally forgot these, also, and slept soundly.

When he wakened in the morning, a bird was sitting on his windowsill, ruffling all its feathers with the violence of its singing, as though it were striving to express in music all the brightness and beauty of the autumn world; but the songster brought no cheer to Bister.

Chance helped him out of bed—he was almost too sore and stiff to walk—and got him into a hot bath—and then massaged the blue and purple splotches on his body while he groaned in protest. Afterwards, however, he felt a little better, and as he got into his clothes a message came that the colonel wished him at once.

"I'll have one swallow of coffee!" pleaded Bister eagerly. "I crave it, Chance!"

"Not a taste! Not a single wasted second!" insisted the valet. "Go to his room at once, sir!"

It reminded Bister of the days of his childhood, when Chance was a cold and removed dignitary, quite capable of giving commands which had to be obeyed; now, as in those times, he made no protest, but humbly limped down the hall and tapped at the closed door.

The brisk, stern voice of the colonel bade him enter. They exchanged polite greetings.

"After all," said the colonel, by way of introduction, "you're still alive, Lindley, I see! I lay here yesterday wondering whether Mistral at that very moment was trampling your life out. Or was that what you *wanted* me to wonder over?"

Bister, having started a rejoinder, changed his mind and remained silent.

"I suppose it was," resumed the colonel. "Yesterday

I spent a good deal of time talking over your case and wondering whether I should not give you another opportunity——"

"I beg your pardon!" broke in Bister.

"Well? Well?"

"You were talking me over?"

"I was!"

"With whom, sir, if I may ask?"

The colonel bit his lip and colored a little.

"With whom except that splendidly honest, sturdy, and upright fellow, your cousin."

"With Jack?"

"Yes."

"You talked over me and my affairs with Jack Lynmouth?"

"And what of that?"

Bister closed his eyes and swallowed hard.

"It is your privilege, I presume," said he.

After this, the colonel regarded him through a dark moment, and went on: "You left the house yesterday like a sulky child, trying to break my heart!"

"I left the house," answered Bister, "because you'd ordered me to take my horse off your place."

"I ordered you not to risk your life on the back of that detestable man-killer! The Prince Regent strain has destroyed one Bister already." He laid has hand upon his heart with a convulsive gesture. "The noblest and most royal-hearted gentleman of a long and noble line, Lindley, was destroyed by one of those treacherous devils. The bravest, freest, and the best of us all was betrayed by a Prince Regent horse. And now you bring one with

the mark of the killer manifestly stamped on it and ask me to stable it and favor your——"

"Accordingly, sir, I took the horse from your place."

"It's ill-bred to interrupt an elder, Lindley! You should have put a bullet through the head of that beast when I directed you to do so."

There was silence.

"Instead," went on the colonel, "you took him away; and every time you leave this house, I'm to imagine you under the heels of that savage monster! You took him away, found a place for him, and while you knew that I lay here eaten up with anxiety——"

"Sir, I knew nothing of the kind!"

"That's untrue."

"Will you say that I am lying, sir?"

"By heavens, young man, do you dare to bait me in my own room?"

"It's a man's right and duty to keep his self-respect."

"Ha? By God, I pray for patience! Self-respect! When you are dragging the name and fame of the Bisters through the muck of wayside taverns and rubbing elbows with foul-mouthed laborers and undergrooms, and ——"

"Did my cousin Jack put that in your mind?" asked Bister.

It was a chance hit, and therefore it told all the more sharply. The colonel paused on his next word, gaped, and then flew into a terrible passion.

"I understand!" he thundered. "You have descended to despicable eavesdropping—a Bister—self-respect—God keep my reason safe!"

Bister turned his back and strode to the door.

"Wait! You shan't leave me like this. If you leave me now, you leave me forever! By the eternal gods, if you leave this house in this moment, you shall never return across my threshold so long as there is life in me!"

"Ten thousand damnations!" cried Bister, his only slender store of patience now completely consumed in the fire. "Do you think that you can bully me and trample on me as you trample on others? Do you think that I'll crawl before you on my knees because you have the family purse in your hands?"

"Lindley Bister," thundered the colonel, "you have cut the last thread that ties you to me!"

"Do you mean your pursestrings?" asked Bister. "Then I'm glad to be free."

"You've driven yourself out of my life. And into disgrace—and out of your heritage! I renounce and deny you!"

"I thank God that I am free."

"Begone, sir. Provision shall be made for your support as becomes a Bister——"

"I despise your money! Let Jack Lynmouth fawn on you and crawl at your feet; I have a few thousands of my mother's money. Do I owe you gratitude for that? If I do, I'll renounce that, also."

"Lindley," cried the old man, thrusting himself half out of bed, "go to your room!"

So Bister turned and left the room, and closed the door heavily behind him.

"That part of my life is ended!" the colonel shouted after him. "Contemptible young ingrate."

He fell back on the bed, rolled from one side to the other, lighted a cigar—or rather burned his fingers in trying to do so, and dashed the good Havana through the window with a terrible oath. Then he clutched the bell with the double ring that summoned Chance.

"Chance," he commanded, "draw a cold bath for me —no, bring me a cold towel!"

It was brought, and tied around the head of the colonel, who lay panting and gasping for some time.

Then he called for port, and having tossed off a liberal potion he said to Chance:

"Has my voice been raised, Chance?"

"No, sir," said Chance. "Not unusually loud."

"Nothing to be heard in the hall, then?"

"No, sir."

"I thank God for that. Go straight to Lindley. Tell the villain to come to me at once. By the eternal heavens, Chance, we've done a bad job in the educating of that young man. Let him grow up with a temper. The most damnable thing in the world is a temper. Where he gets it, I don't know. Bisters all famous for their self-control. We've got to get that vice out of him. Send him up to me at once!"

CHAPTER XXI

In Bister's room Chance found him with a litter piled about, for he had jerked open every drawer and thrown every closet wide, and half the contents were tossed about.

Chance looked upon the scene and then upon the creator of the havoc. Then he gave the message that the colonel wished to see his grandson at once. Peremptorily wished to see him.

"Does he?" answered Bister, absent-mindedly. "Say that I'll be sure to come in before leaving. Then come back here, if he'll let you, and give me a hand, like a good fellow."

The valet hung in the doorway until Bister glanced aside at him. "Well? Well?" asked the master.

"I dare say, sir, that you will find Colonel Bister in a different temper, just now," ventured Chance.

"Hurry, Chance! " was the irritated reply, and Chance disappeared.

He found the colonel raised on both elbows and the expectant eyes of the old man went past the valet.

"Coming, Chance?"

"He says that he will be sure to come in before leaving, sir."

"Before—leaving!" said the colonel in a dying voice. "Chance!"

There was such a wild note of pain in that cry, that even the stony Chance was startled.

"Sir? Sir?" he called, hurrying to the bed.

"Listen!" commanded the colonel suddenly, raising a trembling hand, and then they heard out of the distance a clear voice singing:

> "Go down, go down, go down through the whin, ye!
> Down, down to Peterby spinney,
> For there they've found. Do ye hear him tell?
> It's Dapple, Dapple, as true—"

"Close the window!" said the colonel in tones of iron, and so the window was closed and still the song floated dimly in the distance.

"Mr. Lindley wished to know if he might have my service in packing, sir."

"Damn him and your service both," said the colonel, and caught up a paper, which he held before his face with shaking hands.

Bister had heaped more confusion in the center of the floor when the valet returned, but he had gotten nothing into the suitcase which yawned on the table.

He said to the servant: "I want nothing more than that suitcase, Chance. I'm not going to carry an elephant's pack when I leave, but simply as much as a fighting man could get along with. Because I'm going into the world, Chance. A great thing, that! Going to see new countries, places, faces. Do new things. Make my way. Why didn't I start out long ago?"

He sat in the window and looked out at the glorious

autumn morning, singing again, softly, the ballad of the Dapple Hound and the Peterby Fox.

"Nothing but this single suitcase, sir?"

"No, not an infernal thing but that. I'm going to live as our ancestors lived. When forty men stepped into a fishing smack, Chance, and rowed across the sea to sack a monastery near the enemy's coast—or storm a fat-sided merchantman—or do anything else worth while—why, Chance, they didn't have as much along as would fill a single box like that, you know. Nothing but their battle-axes, the beggars; and their coats of mail had to do duty as pajamas and shirts both. That made men of them, eh? Well, I have a little iron in me, too! You'll see."

"Yes, sir. To begin with shirts——"

"Not more than half a dozen. Socks and underwear same proportion. You might go a bit heavier on the socks. Tennis and such rubs them through so frightfully."

"Then shoes, sir."

"Only a pair or two. That new pair of patent leathers. Supple as gloves, already. And then a couple of pairs of walking shoes."

"Golf and tennis, sir?"

"Tennis, of course. And golf—no, by heavens. I'm not going to waste my days. I'll give it up. Not a single pair of golf shoes!"

"Riding boots, sir?"

"Are you joking, Chance? Of course a man has to ride. Put in that old pair—and the ones I brought back

from London. Amazing leather they have, there. Tell me one thing, Chance."

"Yes, sir."

"Why does an English calf have a tenderer skin than a good American calf. Climate, eh?"

"Perhaps the tanners know a few odd tricks over there."

"Well, I hadn't thought of that. Don't leave out those slippers, will you?"

"Then clothes, sir?"

"Well, dinner and dress. A man must have those things. And a morning coat. Something to ride in, and a few flannels, of course. But as for street clothes, I'll do with nothing but autumn weights. I'll earn my winter outfit, by heavens, or go without. Just throw in two or three tweeds—yes, and that double-breasted blue, eh?"

"Hats, sir?"

"I'll do without an iron hat. That one top hat on the shelf. And a cap or two; and two or three for the street. Damn fashion and the fashionables, Chance. I'm going to show the world that a Bister can still be a Spartan."

"There are a few things in the closets, sir."

"Well, look them over. What's that you're rattling? You might throw in that fishing-rod. The best balanced thing that was ever in the hand of man. Do you remember that moonlight night when we fished the pond and the big five-pound bass rose by the lily pad and sapped the bait—no, I won't have a rifle. Confound it, man, don't you realize that I'm not going to waste my life on sport any longer? That one shotgun. That's all.

And that Luger pistol. Let me see it. How beautifully it sits into the hand, eh?"

"Do you remember these, sir?" asked Chance, turning with an old pair of boxing gloves in his hand.

"Let me see them. Hello! Do I remember them! Look! There's the black smudge where you smashed my nose—that summer I was sixteen——"

"Fifteen, sir."

"That was a grand bout. Taught me to keep my guard up, old Chance, you infernal beguiler! Who would have thought you had such a straight left tucked away in your make-up?"

"No, sir," said Chance. "But it begins to look as though the suitcase will bulge a little!"

Bister walked slowly around the table and examined the huge pile, to which the valet had added sundry items on his own responsibility.

"I could carry the overcoats and the scarfs over my arm," commented the thoughtful Bister. "But still—there'd be a good deal left. After all, Chance, I'll be going by ship, and therefore it doesn't matter what cargo I start with. I can trim it down later."

"By ship, sir?"

"I'm going to Algiers or Madagascar or some place like that. Where there's still a frontier."

"You're leaving Mistral, after all, sir?"

"Mistral? Oh, the devil! I forgot about that. But where *shall* I go, then?"

"Perhaps a word with Colonel Bister would change your mind entirely if——"

"Not another word. Man can't compromise his self-

respect. How could I manage it? Well, get a job in the city." He was thinking aloud. "Live out here. Commute. Thousands do it, eh? Train Mistral. Win the Point-to-point with him—look here, Chance, wouldn't the colonel nearly choke if Mistral won the Point-to-point?"

"It would be a great surprise, sir," said Chance.

"I'll do it, by heaven," declared Bister. "Put up my money on Mistral. Ought to get ten to one against him, eh? Why, I could make a snug little fortune that way, Chance; and set up a house for myself, with a small string of hunters. After all, it's going to be ridiculously easy to beat the game. I can see that!"

He added: "I'll go take a room in the tavern until I've permanent quarters."

"By any chance do you mean Clancy Muldoon's tavern, sir?"

"Why not? Quiet—out of the way—near Divine's, where I'll be working with Mistral—and cheap. And I'm not proud. Let the fashionables turn up their noses at me. What do I care? Besides, I'll be near Clancy's wonderful cider."

"Yes, sir."

"So box up my things, and send them over this afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

"Now," said Bister, "to say good-bye!"

He went to the room of the colonel and entered with a high head.

"You sent for me a moment ago, sir," said he. "I was getting my things together when I had your message."

"It was nothing of importance," said the colonel dryly.

"I have to thank you for being a father to me for years," said Bister. "Ay," he added, "although I've angered you often, and although God knows that I may seem ungrateful, I hope that before the end I'll be able to show you that my heart's right."

"Are you sure that it is?" asked the colonel.

"I feel that it is, sir."

"If that's the case, then you have nothing with which to reproach yourself."

"I have sins enough, sir, but I've never meant harm to you. I hope that we part friends enough to shake hands."

"Lindley," said the old man," when I see you in this humor, I feel that the Bister blood is too strong in both of us—we mustn't part! If you would only show me, Lindley, that what you have done is the result of carelessness—God knows that my heart goes ten steps to meet you, boy! If you would give me a single sign—and all that I ask of you is to admit my authority for your own good—to destroy the savage brute, Mistral, before he destroys you!"

"Will you ask any other thing than that?" begged Bister.

"On that point you'll stick?"

"I've already mailed Mistral's entrance fee for the Point-to-point. You see that I can't go back after that!"

"Damnation, Lindley, can't I write personally and cancel the idiotic letter you've written? Or let the check go. I'll give you another ten times its size—it's simply the principle of the matter——"

"Yes, sir, and what's left to me if people think that I'm afraid of a horse?"

"Do you prize a horse above me, Lindley?"

"I've not said that!"

"You infer it, though. May God preserve my sanity, for you drive me mad!"

"Sir, I'm sorry; I only wish to show you——"

"Boy, will you or will you not show a decent respect to my wishes and——"

"I cannot withdraw from the race. I can't surrender Mistral while he's beating me! But I'll give up the rest of my string. I'd even——"

"Silence, Lindley! I ask you for the last time! Do you rate the possession of a horse above my love and—ten million damnations! You ungrateful scoundrel! Out of my sight forever!"

There was plenty of courage in Lindley Bister, but even he fled from this outburst of wrath into the hall, where the pale Chance waited for him.

"If you'll go back in five minutes, sir——"

"No, never! He's ordered me—Tell Gregory and the rest that I want to speak to them. I'll—I'll meet you downstairs——"

With this, he tapped at the door of Jack Lynmouth, and entering, he found that gentleman wrapped in a flowered dressing gown—for there was a secret touch of personal vanity in Jack—and looking up with a smile from an open book.

"The smile's for the book, and not for me," said Bister. "Well, Jack, you've won; and I'm beaten."

"What on earth's in your mind?" asked Lynmouth.

He yawned a little, but his eyes had suddenly become brilliant.

"You can make a shrewd guess, at least," said Bister dryly. "You have Bister Hall. God give you pleasure in it. But I'll tell you this. You've gnawed your way in like a rat, and no more than a rat will you ever be."

"A long line and a loud one, Lin," said the other, still smiling. "If you were big enough, I'd have to thrash you for that. But as it is, I can only laugh at you."

And he suited the action to the word, filling the room with the deep echo of his mirth. Bister, dim-eyed with rage, glowered savagely at him for a moment, and then left.

CHAPTER XXII

Down the stairs went Bister then, breathing hard, and Chance conducted him out into the rear porch of the old house, where were gathered a semicircle of grooms, gardeners, maids, and under-servants of every description; for the colonel believed that it was unknightly and un-Bisterly to do without plenty of service.

"God bless me!" said Bister, as he looked down their upturned, solemnly expectant faces, "do you think I'll make a speech to you? No, but I want to shake hands with you and say good-bye."

And he passed down among them, and went slowly from one to the other, speaking a few words here and there and taking their hands. He found them all in due order, the most important in the first rank, and the subordinates in the rear; but few who had not been many long years at Bister Hall, for those who came usually stayed until the grave took them. He found them in order, then, and he left them like an army broken in a charge, all knotted in little groups of murmuring men and women except for old Charlotte, who was wailing loudly in the unwilling arms of Jeffreys, the head gardener: "Did you hear him, Jeff? 'I'll probably be living near the Hall for a while. But whether I'm near or far, if you come to trouble, write to me, Charlotte,' says he, 'because I'll want to take care of you as you've taken care of me.' God shield and bless him, the lamb!"

"Will ya hold your peace, woman, and stop spoilin' my best coat?" asked Jeffreys. " 'Come to see me, Jeff,' says he to me, 'and tell me how the dahlias come in their season.' An eye for flowers and all that's fine is what he had, and the good old days will never come back to Bister Hall, woman. Mark me down and never you forget it!"

Bister had gone back to the house with Chance, and in the lower hall he found tall Gregory, and Tod Loomis, and Darley, gathered in a solemn group.

"My friends—" said Bister, when he was interrupted by the sound of a great breath taken by one of the three.

"My old friends—" began Bister again. "I want you to know—what I mean to say is—I—Chance!"

"Yes, sir."

"I—I can't talk."

"There's no need of a word, sir."

"Gregory, damn your black heart!" murmured Darley, cook and ex-pirate, and he turned to the wall and buried his face in his hands.

For though Gregory retained the perfect expression of the perfect butler—face immobile but with the slightly raised brows which indicate attentiveness—although he retained the facial composure which had withstood many a vast shock in his day, great tears were now glittering down his face and splashing in ruinous profusion upon the flawless lapels of his coat.

"Take me away, Chance," said Bister faintly. "Get me out of this quickly."

And Chance took him away, guiding him with care, for Bister was blind; out to the side entrance they went and found Tim McFarland standing beside the roadster. Then Bister turned and looked back at the Hall.

"I feel very bad, Chance," said the boy, resting a heavy hand on the shoulder of the valet. "I feel almost as if I were going to die!"

"Will you sit down here, sir?"

"No, Chance. If I stay another minute I'll never be able to go—I'll crawl back to his feet—oh God, Chance, how terribly the old house is rooted in me! Turn your face away!"

"Yes, sir."

"It's the damned live oak, there. I saw where the swing used to hang. Don't look at me. I can't help it! Do you remember the day the swing broke and you carried me? Where's my handkerchief? Confound it, why don't you put a handkerchief——"

"Here, sir."

"Now, Chance, how do I look?"

"Perfectly all right, sir."

"No one would suspect anything?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Then I'll go. Get out of my way. Don't speak to me; and don't let me see you."

"No, sir."

"Well, Tim, good-bye."

"No, sir," said Tim. "My time is up, here in Bister Hall."

"What, are you going with me?"

"Ay, sir."

"You can't do it, Tim, you idiot. I'm a poor man, now. Confoundedly poor. Can't afford any luxuries."

"As for wages," said Tim McFarland with dignity, "it ain't wages that I work for. Money ain't a thing to me, sir. Besides, I wouldn't trust you with your car, just now."

Bister capitulated.

"Then get me out of here. I'm dazed. Get me out of here. Quick!"

And in another moment the listening ears in the depths of Bister Hall heard the roar of the opened exhaust; Jack Lynmouth, from an open window, watched the roadster swing on to the road and dart away. He showed no exultation, but his glance fixed far away in the distance, as one who has great works before him.

In the meantime, a bell began to clamor in the house, and Charlotte, wiping her eyes, discovered that it was the bell of Chance which was at work. She hurried to find him; and presently she came down the stairs and said to Gregory with streaming eyes: "I went to get Chance; the Colonel is ringing like mad. And I found him, where d'you think?"

"Well?" said Gregory, who disliked the familiar tone of Charlotte.

"I found him up in Mr. Lindley's room sitting in all the wreck of everything—what do you think, Gregory?"

"And how can I guess, woman?"

"With a pair of old boxing gloves on his hands! I told him that the colonel was ringing terrible for him.

" 'Ah?' says Chance.

"The same as if I'd told him that the sky was clearing, y'understand. 'Ah?' says he.

"But what'll we do about the colonel's bell?"

Mr. Gregory himself seemed obscurely interested in some distant object, but now he said with a sigh: "Ay, what was he to any of us, compared to what he is to Chance? I'll go to the colonel."

He found, the colonel an apoplectic red.

"This house has gone to the dogs!" thundered the colonel. "This house has gone to the confounded dogs. I've rung this bell for an hour and a half and no response. I might have choked. What's the meaning of this?"

"Sorry, sir," said Gregory.

"What car was that which roared away past the house a minute ago?"

"The car, sir—as a matter of fact, it was the roadster of Mr.—ah——"

"Very well!" said the colonel, after staring a moment. "Very well, indeed! He'll be back, though. He'll be back with a lesson learned! A confoundedly thorough lesson, too! I'll teach him who—Gregory!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Why in hell doesn't Chance answer this bell?"

"I beg your pardon, sir——"

"What's that got to do with it? Go find Chance and tell him that he's discharged. I won't have a man slack. Can't take advantage of me. Not till the grave has me, by God. I won't have you people slacking. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. I was about to say that Chance is a little sick, sir."

"Ha?" bellowed the colonel.

"Yes, sir."

"Is Chance sick?"

"Sorry, sir. If you'll allow me to serve you in his place, sir——"

"Leave the room, Gregory. I want nothing! Nothing!"

Gregory backed softly through the door, and raising his eyes at the last moment, he saw Colonel Bister turning to the wall.

CHAPTER XXIII

Judge Postlethwaite arrived at Bister Hall in the early afternoon. He was shown into the library, where he found the colonel in an easy chair, with one bandaged foot resting on cushions and a pair of crutches leaning near by. The judge came in with a springing step and a smile of good cheer, which Colonel Bister watched sourly.

"I see that you've heard," said he.

"I?" echoed the innocent judge. "Heard what, Charles?"

"You have your funeral manner on," said the colonel. "Confound it, Whitney, I'm not an orphan or a widow, you know!"

At this, the judge grew more sober and sat down close to his old friend.

"The Tavistock hounds were out this morning," said the colonel. "I saw the hunt cross the meadow on a burning scent. Did they kill?"

"They did not," answered the judge. And he added after a moment: "It's a deuce of a bad business, my old friend."

"It is," said the colonel. "They ought to sell the entire run of dogs in this part of the world and bring in some new stock. They've been breeding to the standard for so long that there isn't a dog that can kill a fox in the entire lot!"

"Do you say that of the Borrogate Pack?"

"They're a rare exception. I've had my hand in the making and the keeping of those hounds. But I speak of the rest."

"Tell me," said the judge. "Did you bring me over here to talk about dogs?"

"Lindley has left the house, judge," said the colonel. "He's deserted me in my age, after I've showered on him all the tenderness and love of a father for these years. But I see that you've heard about it."

"Of course the whole countryside knows about it," said the judge.

"Ay," groaned the colonel, "that's the curse of the telephone and the rest of this electric age. Bad news has wings, though good news is as slowfooted as it ever was! I hoped that I could send you over to drag the fool of a boy back home; but now I suppose it's too late. First, I want to ask you if I've been at fault with him?"

"I've heard that the Kentucky horse is at the bottom of it," said the judge, answering indirectly.

"He wants to get himself murdered by the beast," said the colonel. "I refused to allow him to; this is the result."

"Is he less sure to be murdered by the horse now that he's away from Bister Hall?" asked the judge suddenly.

"By heavens, Whitney," cried the colonel, "I believe that you side with Lindley in this matter!"

"I haven't said so."

"I can see my fault. The years of patience and of kindness, the absolute folly with which I've put up with his intolerable temper. You know, judge, that I'm patient to a fault!"

"Ah?" murmured the judge.

"Flew into an unprovoked passion and left the house! The young idiot!"

"He'll probably come back," said the judge.

"Man, do you think so?" gasped the colonel eagerly.

"What funds has he?"

"A few thousands that his mother gave him in her will. Utter damned nonsense, these early settlements that women will insist on making. Ruins a man's chance to control and discipline his children. But not enough to give him any interest to speak of. He spends money like wildfire, you know."

"Humph!" grunted the judge. "Are you so sure that he won't spend the capital?"

"I think not. No, he couldn't be such a fool—and yet —damn it, I hadn't thought of that! Besides, he says that he'll go to work. But what could he do? Would anybody take him?"

"Why not? I know a good many men who would pay a great deal for a young fellow of absolute integrity——"

"But you can head them off, judge? Keep them from making any offer? There was something about an advertising firm——"

"I understand. Yes, I can reach those people, I think."

"We'll fence him in," said the colonel, exultant, "and teach him that we're not such old fools, eh? Do you know where he's gone?"

"No."

"To Clancy Muldoon's tavern to take rooms! Rented the upper floor! Confound him, dragging the family name through the dust like that. Judge, are you smiling?"

"No, Charles. No, no!"

"I sent him over a check for his first month," said the colonel. "Not enough for him to live on, but enough to show that I'm not wanting him to starve to death."

"How much?"

"Five hundred, only. But you see——"

"Too much, Charles. That's six thousand a year. And a single man——"

"Tush! You don't know his habits! He'll get through that in a week, and then where will he turn? I tell you, he's in my hand, Judge!"

"I hope so," replied Judge Postlethwaite.

"Where's Halcyone?"

"Walking in the garden with Lynmouth."

"Ah? What do you think of that lad?"

"A fine, upstanding fellow."

"He's all that, and more. I may have something to say to you about him, later on."

Here a note was brought to the colonel, who tore it open, began to read, and then crushed it in his fist with a roar of anger.

"Read it!" he thundered, and hurled it at the judge.

When the latter had unfolded and smoothed the paper, he read: "I'm returning the check with a thousand thanks. But it's time for me to make my own way in the world. Other Bisters have done as much; and I think that I'm not too thin skinned to succeed as they did. Certainly I don't want to live on charity!"

"Hello," said the judge, "is this the way of it? I rather like that note, Charles!"

"You do? It shows his plain imbecility, for one thing, and for another thing, it shows that he lacks any respect to his elders. Certainly that sticks out on the face of this letter!"

"Disrespect?"

"Why, man, you can see that if you're not blind. He doesn't need me. He'll get on by himself. What am I to him? Mere wreck of a man. A hulk that he's forgetting as fast as he can!"

"Charles," said the judge gently, "I think that you're wrong. I think that the lad loves you."

"Ah?" cried the colonel. "Do you think that? I wonder! I wonder! If I could think so. Well, well, there's something about the boy that tugs at the strings of my heart! What now?" he snapped, as a tap came at the door, and Chance appeared. "What do you all want?"

"When you have a moment's time, sir," said Chance, "we would like to speak with you, or else ask you to read this note."

"Speak to me? You can see that I'm busy. Well, give me the note, and scatter!"

When they were gone, he ripped the note open.

"They've gone around the house like so many owls," said the colonel savagely. "Ever since Lindley left, the house has been like a graveyard. You would actually think, Whitney, that the blockheads blamed me! For what? For too infernally great kindness and forebearance to the rascal—eh? God bless my soul!"

He read aloud, his voice broken with rage time and again:

"Dear Sir,

We beg to give notice because we feel that Mr. Lindley may have need of us now that he is alone in the world. Will you kindly let us know when we may expect our discharge from your service?

Respectfully,

We are your obedient servants:

THOMAS CHANCE,
CHANDLER GREGORY,
THEODORE LOOMIS,
WILLIAM DARLEY."

"By the Lord!" cried the judge, leaning back in his chair and laughing heartily, "This is rare! Cook, head groom, butler, and valet, all gone at a swoop! You'd better come over and stay with me, Charles, and give up housekeeping!"

"It's Lindley!" said the colonel. "The traitor has suborned them to this treachery. Couldn't find any other way to strike me, so he has stabbed me in the back! Gregory, Loomis—my God, in the very middle of the hunting, Loomis gone! Darley—by heavens, judge, he's the best cook in the county! And Chance! I can't believe it! Chance!"

He pressed the bell, and Chance appeared.

"Go to the traitor, you and the rest," cried the colonel. "Tell him that I despise his underhanded ways. I thank God that I now see the entire black truth about him. Now, get out of my sight!"

Chance vanished, and the colonel turned back to his friend—and so turning his glance passed through the window and observed Lynmouth walking at the side of

the girl—she laughing up at the tall, handsome young fellow.

"Look what Providence has sent to me—to you—to both of us, Judge! Look! Do you see?"

"I see Lynmouth and Halcyone. What of that?"

"It's the answer from heaven. When you go home, draw up a new will for me. I don't care what you say in it except that Lindley is to be cut off without a penny. And the whole estate goes to Lynmouth. Every damned penny, and every acre!"

"Steady, steady!" said the judge. "You're rushing very far ahead, old fellow. How do you know that Lindley is worthy of such extremely harsh treatment?"

"I've watched him grow to manhood. Been a blind old fool, doted on him, given him every tenderness and care, surrounded him with luxury; never given him so much as a single unkind word except in jest; and now he stabs me in the back—the underhanded villain! I tell you, judge, my heart is a stone. A cold, senseless stone in my breast!"

The judge was silent.

"There the dream of these many, many years vanishes, Charles," said he. "Halcyone was to marry the heir to Bister Hall—marry your name, Charles. And so my lifework and yours would be united. Ah, well, all of these fine, poetic fancies are bound to go up in smoke. I suppose that they're bound to, but still it leaves a most infernal void in my soul!"

"Whitney," said the colonel, pointing through the window where the young couple had been seen, "don't you understand the thing now? Lynmouth is a Bister; as

much of one as Lindley. And willing to drop his last name, if I say the word, and become a whole Bister. Soaked in the family traditions. Can tell you more about Bister history than I can, I think! Honorable, decent, steady, dependable—a rock of dependence, Whitney! And as a matter of fact, you never could have induced Halcyone to marry Lindley. Not after the exhibition that he gave in front of her the other night——"

"As a matter of fact, she doesn't seem to dislike him."

"Too well trained to show her feelings," said the colonel. "But I know that the girl is a lady, and I know what she must feel. Whereas Lynmouth would make an ideal match for her!"

"Tell me," said the judge solemnly, "do you firmly and irrevocably take your affection away from Lindley?"

"Firmly and irrevocably!" said the colonel. "I swear by all——"

"No," said the judge, taking the hand of his friend. "Don't swear, Charles. An oath is a weight of lead around the neck of many a man, compelling him to old resolves that he has detested for years. It will do without your oath. But my own feeling in this matter——"

"What's wrong with Lynmouth, then?"

"Nothing. Except that I don't warm to him, Charles."

"Exactly! A flashy fellow like Lindley will give you something to think about and torment you into taking an interest in him and his affairs. But Lynmouth is the slow and steady type. You can be sure that he'll grow upon you by degrees, and once having taken a step forward, he'll never take a step back. The man's like a Wellington, or a Washington. Nothing brilliant and wild, but resolute, determined, honest, faithful—slow to

grow angry—why, man, he and I haven't passed a single unpleasant word with one another!"

"Tell me one thing," asked the anxious judge. "Does he know what his place will be if Lindley——"

"I'll tell you more than you ask. The fact is that he pleaded with me on behalf of Lindley. Yes, sir, he pleaded with me even after he knew that I was going to offer him Lindley's place as heir of Bister Hall. Urged me to have more patience——"

"A very fine thing, colonel."

"Why, Whitney, I'm not a diplomat or a scientist. But I know horses and I know men! Believe me, the lad is the purest gold. Follow my lead here, Whitney. Follow my lead, and forget Lindley. Let him work out his own destiny, as the fool declares that he wants to do. In the meantime, put everything in the hands of Lynmouth. Trust me in trusting him! But can you handle Halcyone?"

"Halcyone? Mold her like wax! Have no fear of that, whatever!"

"Then the thing is done!"

"It is, Charles. And you seem very sad about it!"

"This day," said the colonel," I've taken out my old heart and put a new one in its place. But I shall never change back, so help me——"

"You've said enough."

"But you're with me?"

"You have a right to take me with you to almost any distance," said the judge.

"Have I your hand on it?"

"Ay, Charles; but it seems a melancholy business, after all!"

CHAPTER XXIV

From the tavern, so soon as the bewildered Muldoon had named and accepted terms for the rooms, Bister darted the roadster to Divine's house and found the fair Kitty tempting Mistral vainly with a wisp of hay rich with barley heads, while her father swung an axe with a will at the woodpile not far off.

"Not fired, Kitty!" said Bister. "You haven't lost your place in the great Isaacstein's show?"

"Lost it?" said Kitty, staring. "Well, I should say not! Lost it? Nope. I'm just taking a vacation. I'm just depressed, you know."

"Look at her!" said the father, approaching. "Dog-gone me, Mr. Lindley, if you wouldn't think that she was always in front of a camera. Look at the way she's tucking up her hair and grinning at you! Kitty, you little fool, Mr. Bister ain't gunna take a snapshot of you!"

"Dear dad!" said Kitty, turning on her sire a charming smile. "Dear dad! I suppose it's a sign of growing old, don't you think so? Being so testy, I mean."

"What are you going to do with him to-day?" asked Divine, throwing a scowl at his daughter.

"Ride him," said Bister shortly. "Where's Lefty? Lefty! Throw a saddle on Mistral, will you?"

"Well," drawled Lefty, rising from the corner where he was sunning himself, "I dunno that there's any hurry.

It'll take an hour to get a saddle on him, after the trouble that you threw into him the other day."

"Then let it go," sighed Bister. "After all, I'm glad of an excuse not to ride the brute to-day. I have to go to town."

Lefty relaxed in his distant corner again, and buried himself behind a paper-backed volume.

"You got forty minutes to get to the next train, Kitty," said her father, looking at his watch. "Are you gunna start?"

"He doesn't understand," said Kitty, appealing to the superior wisdom of Bister. "He don't know that you have to be feeling fit before you can face the camera, Mr. Bister."

"Are they gunna stop the show on account of you?" roared Mike Divine.

"Let 'em try to use that smart Ethelda Lancaster, with her society airs—the dish-faced thing!" said Miss Divine. "They gotta find out that they need me, and it's as good a time now as any. Besides, I ain't myself, to-day."

"It's disgusting, ain't it?" asked Mike Divine. "Would you take her for my daughter? No, you wouldn't! It's you that brings her here, sir."

"Father!" cried the beautiful Kitty.

"That fetches her, you see. It's the truth that makes 'em howl. I stepped on a sore toe that time, did I, you monkey? Well, sir, that's a fact. She's setting her hat for you."

"Mr. Lindley, you ain't going to believe a word that he says, I hope and pray!"

"Not a word, Kitty."

"Says she to her ma: 'D'you think that Mr. Lindley likes me?' And her ma says: 'He's got an eye in his head, I hope!' Damned if all women ain't fools, sir!"

"Mr. Lindley," pleaded Kitty, close to tears.

"I don't hear him, Kitty," laughed Bister.

"Dad, you're just contemptible!"

"Spends an hour primping," continued the terrible Divine. "And then when she sees your roadster comin' around the bend, she tears out and starts workin' on Mistral with that handful of hay——"

"I hate you!" cried Kitty. "And—I'll *never* go back to work on that miserable movie!"

"Who wants you to?" roared her father. "Stop lookin' at yourself through a telescope. You ain't so much. Ten years'll wipe the looks off of that face of yours; and then what are you? Gwan and marry some decent young feller and raise a family. But quit tryin' to pick the stars out of the sky. Gwan into the house, now, and talk it all over with your ma. *She'll* take your side."

Kitty fled for the house, weeping, and the irate father continued: "Women'll drive a man mad, if you take 'em serious. Treat 'em mean. That's the only way. Look at that girl. Education spoiled her. She was a good kid till she went to high school for a couple of years. It give her ideas. We men, Mr. Bister, was put here to do the thinkin' for the women, but they can't understand. And who's that, maybe?"

He broke off this discourse as a car stopped by the driveway, and through the cloud of dust that blew up be-

hind it came a quick-stepping young man with a hat pushed on the back of his head.

"Is there a kid named Lefty, around here?" he asked. "James G. Henley is the name," he continued, presenting a card.

"Detective agency?" murmured Divine, studying the card. "I thought so. Why, you can fair smell jail the minute that you look at that brat. Lefty! Hey, Lefty!"

Lefty had disappeared.

"He seen you coming," said Divine. "He was yonder, a minute ago."

"I'll get him, then; where was he?"

"You won't get him. He's probably shied down the back way to the creek, where there's more places to hide than you could shake a stick at."

The detective lighted a cigarette and pushed his hat a little farther back on his head.

"Well," said he," it's a small-time job—but I was passing by this way. When he turns up, grab him for me, will you?"

"Nothin'," said Divine, "would please me no better. But here's his boss. This is Mr. Lindley Bister."

"What's he done?" asked Bister.

"Aw, an old game. Just the old pocket-picking stunt in a crowd. But the gent he cleaned got a look at him. So he's on his way to jail, sooner or later. What is he? A rat?"

"He is," said the Irishman. "Half a rat, only. But poison."

"He goes heeled, maybe?"

"He does, and he'd shoot. A bad one, Henley."

"Thanks," said the detective.

"How much was it?" asked Bister.

"Four hundred cold."

"And to cover expenses?"

"Ah, he's useful, is he? Why, a hundred would do that."

"That's all," said Bister. "You may hear from him in a day or two."

So James G. Henley departed, and his car had no sooner swung around the bend than Lefty appeared at the door of a shed, yawning.

"What a ham that guy is!" said the mild Lefty.

But Bister called the youngster to one side. He took a check book from his pocket, wrote out a check, and presented it.

"And?" asked Lefty, looking down with a frown. "Five hundred for what?"

"Lefty," said his master, "I don't know what to think of you. You have a bad streak in you that's nearly a mile wide. God knows how many bad things you've done in your life. But on the other hand, there's a streak of grit in you, too; and I like it. Besides, I need you for Mistral. There's a check for five hundred dollars. You can send that to this address—here's the detective's card —and you'll be square with the world and safe from jail again. Or else, you can cash that check and jump this part of the country with the proceeds. I leave that to your own discretion."

He turned his back and returned to Divine, while Lefty, without a word of thanks, with a cunning glint

in his narrow eyes, stored the check in a wallet, and disappeared around the corner of the shed.

Mr. Divine, in the meantime, poured forth his opinion of Lefty with some heat. To save that young rascal would be an act of the most absolute idiocy, he declared. "Because," said he, "you may think that the kid is worth fishing for, in spite of his looks. But he ain't an eel; he's a snake, and a poison one!"

"Let Lefty be," said Bister. "I want to talk about something important. Mistral! Tell me, Mike!"

Mistral, as though he could hear the name which had been spoken, and as though he understood, suddenly approached the corral fence and thrust his head between the bars with pricking ears.

"Look at him!" grinned the Irishman. "Beauty, ain't he? Well, you see, that's the thing that's wrong with him."

"Go on, Mike. I'm listening."

"Horses are like women, that way."

"Women?"

"I mean, take a girl that's a hell-bender for good looks, and what're you gunna find about her? That's she's either a dumb one or else she's plain bad. Bad as the inside lining of hell, sir! And that's the way with horses. What're the good hunters like? Why, wrong-headed brutes to look at. Nothing much right, you'd say to take a quick look at 'em. And ain't racers a spindle-legged breed of giraffes? High-hipped and slab-sided, half of them. Well, when you get a beautiful horse, a picture horse, they're good to show, and that's all; or else,

they're mean as the devil. Well, you've got the second kind, there. God never intended no good to come out of Mistral, and no good'll ever come. He's ate and lived by poison for three years, according to Lefty. You'll never get it out of his system. You may ride him to-day, but to-morrow he'll kill you sure, sir!"

This verdict was delivered out of a full heart by Mike Divine, and young Bister listened to it with a fallen head.

"But if he should?" he said desperately, at last. "If he should take a turn to the right and learn better manners?"

"Turn straight?" Mike Divine put back his head and squinted at the stallion like an artist at a picture he was painting. "Why, sir," he concluded, "I've lived with horses and for horses all my life, and I've never seen anything that looked up to him! There's all the rest, over there. And here's Mistral!"

CHAPTER XXV

When the judge and Halcyone Tiverton got home, they had tea in the big library, looking south into the last of the autumn sunshine, with the hills rolling like waves of parti-colored fire towards the west.

"Halcyone!" said the judge, when he had come to his second cup. "Halcyone, how many men have asked you to marry them?"

Halcyone was not startled. She merely looked sidewise out the window while she counted.

"Seven—men," said Halycone.

"And that leaves out what?" asked the judge.

"Oh, that leaves out the boys, you know."

"Tell me. When does one become a man and cease being a boy?"

"Why," began Halcyone—and then she paused. "I don't know. But you just can tell the difference. Why do you ask?"

"How many," asked the judge, "did you accept—out of the seven?"

"Uncle Whitney!" she cried.

"And why not?"

"Without asking you?" said she.

The judge lighted a cigar and looked at her through the smoke. For fifteen years he had worked very hard, but he was contented. He would be glad to work fifteen more for the same cause.

"You've never been tempted?" said the judge.

"Never," said she.

And then, as he smiled with an enormous satisfaction, she added unexpectedly: "The right men never have asked me."

"Ha?" cried the judge, almost startled from his chair. "Who were the right men?"

"One was a half-back," said Halcyone.

"A college boy, eh?"

"No, he was twenty-two. Then there was a simply beautiful young dancer at the Palace——"

"A scoundrelly vaudevillian!"

"You said that you wanted to know."

"Go on! Go on. Any more?"

"Lots! There was a wonderful Polish violinist who gave a recital at the school——"

"Stop, Halcyone! In the name of God, have you been in love with all these idiots?"

"I never had a chance to be in love with them," said Halcyone, "but if any of them had wanted me, I would have had to wire to you at once, I think."

"It's high time for you to stay at home," declared the judge. "High time!"

"Yes, Uncle Whitney," said she, and looked at the floor.

"Halcyone!"

"Yes?"

"Are you laughing at me?"

"Oh no," said she, and raised eyes so big and clear that the judge was forced to look another way. He fell into a daydream that lasted some seconds.

"But sooner or later you'll have to marry someone."

"Yes, Uncle Whitney."

He drew the smoking stand nearer so that he could pat his hand on its polished top; for the gesture gave him a semi-official feeling.

"In such a matter as that, Halcyone, you would consult me?"

"Oh, of course!"

"Then why not marry a little sooner than later—marry and get the business over with?"

She was silent.

"Eh, Halcyone?"

"Yes, Uncle Whitney."

"Because," said he, "I have the very man in mind!"

She was silent again, not looking at the floor, now, but fixedly, wistfully at him.

"I'm going to tell you a story," said he, settling himself in the chair. "A long time ago, after your Aunt Martha died—how you would have loved her, my dear!"

"Yes—dear Uncle Whitney!"

"I went to the dogs. Completely. Threw up everything and tried to amuse myself. Just about that time, you were handed over to me as a ward, though you can't remember it. And a month later I had misappropriated more than a hundred thousand dollars of your money! Makes you detest me, honey?"

"It makes me love you more, dear!"

"Ha? I never can understand how the mind of a woman works. There's no logic in any of you! However, it was the horses—and liquor—and—well, the devil's old story. Except that I was really an excep-

tional fool, you know. But one evening—you had a stomach ache, Hal, and I could hear you crying upstairs. That evening I sat here by the fire—in that leather chair —with a gun in my hand, my dear. Hush!"

He closed his eyes, and went on: "Colonel Bister walked in on me; I stuffed the gun under the cushion of the chair and listened to him while he told me that I was playing the part of an ass, and a coward. A coward to throw up my hands, as I'd been doing. And—well, a few moments later I was out of that chair and he happened to sit down in it. He felt the gun through the cushion, and pulled it out."

The judge opened his eyes, again.

"You've never heard the colonel's full vocabulary, Hal. But it's a magnificent one, and that night he used it all on me! Before he finished, he had my complete story. And when he left, I had Bister's check for one hundred and eleven thousand dollars, several hundreds, and a few odd cents. The exact sum I had taken from your inheritance."

"I could have guessed it!" said Halcyone Tiverton, her head in the air. "I could have guessed that a Bister would do a thing like that!"

"You like the family, eh?"

"I've never liked any other half so well!"

"That's good! That's good! Well, Hal, that evening turned me about-face. I stopped playing the fool and began to play more of the man. In a year I could hand back the colonel's money. And ever since good fortune has been with me. Do you know what you are worth to-day?"

"I don't know, Uncle Whitney."

"Just a shade under seven millions," said he. And he raised his hand to stop any comment. "But what is important for you to know, just now, is that Bister and I have made this campaign together. He's a helpless child about his own affairs, but he can give good advice to his friends, and he gave me many a good tip. Gradually, a scheme formed in my mind. Bister was the source of all that I had done; therefore he should receive the fruit of it; and I vowed to myself that when you came back from school of a marriageable age, you should marry the heir of Bister Hall! There you are! And the cat's out of the bag!"

Halcyone, with clasped hands and starry eyes, said not a word.

"Look here, my dear," said he, "I think that you really approve!"

"You've—you've dwelt on the thing so long—it's the work of your life, Uncle Whitney," said she. "What a wretched creature I should be if I stood in the way, now!"

"My dear, good girl!" breathed the judge. "Besides, I think that you may like the fellow for himself."

"I think that I do," said Halcyone frankly.

"He's very young," admitted the judge.

"I'm not so very old, myself," said she.

"No, child, no! And Bister and I, together, could see that you and the boy started right. We could overlook things a little."

"Of course—of course!" said she.

And then she added: "But do you think that he could care for me—really?"

"Could he care for you—really?" mimicked the judge; "If the infernal puppy dared not to love you," he added in a mighty voice, "I'd horsewhip him with my own hand!"

She shook her head, a little impatient. "No one could *make* him do anything," said she. "He's so strong!"

"Ah," smiled the judge. "I see how it is. And, after all, that's the proper attitude. Strong as a mountain! That's the way a man should seem to his wife. Well, well, well! You've been keeping something from me these last few days, I'm afraid. However, don't have any doubts about the thing. I could see Jack Lynmouth's face when he was walking in the garden with you, to-day. He'll be very amenable to reason, you may trust, when he learns that he's to have a chance to marry you, Hal! The lucky dog! The lucky, lucky dog!"

"Jack Lynmouth?" said the girl, rather faintly.

"Yes, even the handsome Jack, himself. I could see that he was interested! But if you're in doubt, I'll let you know point blank, in another moment."

A desk telephone was just behind him, and he picked it up and called a number into the mouthpiece.

"But, Uncle Whitney," said a very dazed Halycone, "but——"

"Tush! I want to speak to Colonel Bister. This is Judge Postlethwaite."

Then a pause.

"I only wish to say—" began Halcyone.

"You don't have to say a thing. Just sit down and wait, and don't blush. Hello, Charles. I've talked the matter over with Halcyone. Are you sure it's right with

Jack? More than right, eh? Well, sir, then you'll be glad to know that Halcyone doesn't seem a bit sad about it. No, quite the opposite. What do you hear from Lindley? Nothing, eh?——Hold on, Charles.———— After all, he may not have asked them to come along with him.————Well, you'll be arrested if you talk like that over the telephone, you know. No, no. Good-bye—good-bye!"

He put down the telephone with a chuckle.

"The four oldest servants at the Hall have walked out to go to join Lindley," said the judge, putting down the telephone. "Four best-trained servants in the county to wait on that disinherited young rogue in his rooms at the tavern. At the tavern!"

Halcyone, white and still, leaned back in her chair.

"By the way, you must send that Kempis horse back to Lindley. He's practically a poor man, now. Can't be taking such expensive presents from him, you know."

"No," said Halcyone. "No, no! I'll send him back at once. I'll send Hudson over with him at once. Is he disinherited, Uncle Whitney? Has he no money?"

"Hardly a penny. A lesson that's worth a million, though. You'll see him at the knees of the colonel in a week or so. I know these proud young bloods! Poverty'll tame 'em, quickly enough! But I see how it is, Hal. You want to be alone. Want to dream things out, eh? Sit here in the sun. There we are! What a blessing from a kind God that my plans and your wishes should agree!"

CHAPTER XXVI

HALCYONE could not come down to dinner that evening; a sudden headache had taken her, it appeared, so afterwards the judge tapped at the door of her room.

"It's an evening as clear as a bell, Hal," said he. "Come along for a spin, and it'll blow the clouds out of your head in no time at all."

A dull, husky voice answered: "I don't think that I'm up to it, Uncle Whitney."

"Make the trial, my dear."

"I really can't go."

"Just a short jaunt over to Borrogate and back. I want to drop in on Lindley and speak to him about taking back Kempis. It's a thing that you'd better talk to him about, too."

"I *will* go, then," said she, with a sudden energy. "I'll be ready in five minutes, Uncle Whitney."

"There's a good girl. You won't regret it. Every star's out."

In fact, he had barely had time to order the car to the front door before she came down wrapped in a great fur coat with the collar of it turned up, but even so the judge saw that she was extremely flushed.

"Ay," said he, "that's the way with a woman. Sadden 'em or gladden 'em, they always cry. A little too much good news to-day, I see! Come, Hal. Here we are. I'll

drive slowly, and you'll see how quickly the fresh air will pick you up!"

She talked of Lindley Bister on the way. Was he, in fact, destitute? Had he no resources? Would he suffer much?

He'd suffer no more than he deserved, declared the judge sternly, and in the meantime, why did she not talk about the man in whom her real interest was? Jack Lynmouth!

But, at this, she became silent, and bowed her head against the rush of the wind. So they whizzed through Borrogate and stopped at the tavern.

"You wait half a moment, and I'll be out again," said the judge.

"But I'd rather go," said she. "It—it's cold out here in the car, you know."

She went in with him. Voices sounded here and there through the old building, but when they pulled the front bell, they had no response except the whistling of the wind around their ears; so they pushed the front door open, and then they found themselves in a squalid hall, over which a single oiled lamp with a smoked chimney cast a gloomy light. Gray spiderwebs of immense antiquity draped the horns of the hunting trophies along the walls, and the matting which covered the floor was half-moldy from long disuse—and worn thin in the center by feet which no longer stepped the earth, no doubt.

"Shall we go up?" asked the girl, coming a little closer to the judge, and peering anxiously up the stairs. "What a place! What a place to live! Poor Lindley! It's like a prison!"

"Love of low company brings him here," said the unmoved judge. "There's no reason why he should come to a low hole in the ground like this. He could afford to be respectable—if he wanted to! I'll go up and find his room."

"But—oh!—" said the girl. "I don't want to stay here alone."

They went up the stairs together, stumbling in the ragged matting, once or twice; and a cold, moldy dampness breathed about them. Now another lamp gloomed above them, and they turned on to the level of the second floor.

"Someone's singing!" said the girl. "Listen! What a dreadful, dreadful voice!"

In fact, it was a voice with what could only be termed a bloodthirsty roar and rumble in it; a vast, thick, discordant, rushing, storming gale of a voice that made the air quiver even in the hall. And this is the song that the judge and his niece listened to, beginning at the point where they first heard it:

"Three black boats in a drivin' tide,
And a wind behind 'em as hot as noon,
And the hull of the junk agin the moon—
We laid along and went up her side."

The chorus was joined by several strong, rich voices:

"Who's the skipper and who's the mate?
Chinee gin! Chinee gin!
And who keeps watch on the deck so late?
Nothin' to care for but Chinee gin!

"The Chinks come up with a terrible yell,
With a trample and snort like a herd of bulls—
We stood by the hatch and cracked their skulls
And turned the junk adrift for hell.

"You keep the fat girl with the grin—
She's your tonnage and she's your size;
But gimme the girl with the greasy eyes,
Greasy black and a yeller skin.

"Who's the skipper and who's the mate?
Chinee gin! Chinee gin!
And who keeps watch on the deck so late—"

Here the judge thrust open a door after a knock which was quite drowned in the uproar of the chorus, and Halcyone could look into a chamber where, seated at a table in solitary state, with a half-demolished frame of a roast chicken before him, sat Lindley Bister, the disinherited scion of Bister Hall, now beating time with a fork, and his head tilted back in the joy of the song. To the side stood the tall Gregory, magnificent, immobile, but lending the rumble of a deep bass to the chorus; opposite the master, propping open the door to the improvised kitchen, was Darley the chef, robed in spotless white, his cap at a piratically rakish angle, and a great ladle in his mighty hand while he bellowed the air; and behind him, half lost in the steam and the smoke of the kitchen, appeared the group of Tim McFarland and Tod Loomis, leaning against one another while they strained their voices towards the tenor part.

Darley was the first to see the guests, and allowed the

door to swing back and shut out the picture of his startled face. Then Gregory came with his long, noiseless step, and Bister jumped from his chair.

"Well, sir; well, sir," said the judge with a tremendous frown, "you are not entirely downhearted, it seems!"

"One has to keep one's spirit up," said Bister. "Besides, you know, there's no use crying over spilled milk. Sit down and have some dinner with me, Judge Postlethwaite. Darley is an idiot. He cooks ten times more than I can eat."

"I have dined," said the judge heavily. "The matter upon which we came, Lindley——"

"But, Uncle Whitney," said the girl, "I'm really starved."

The judge turned a thunderous look upon her, but she did not seem to understand.

"I had a dreadful headache and couldn't touch dinner," she explained to Bister; "but the fresh air has blown the sickness away. You said it would, Uncle Whitney!"

The judge bit his lip. But what could he do?

Gregory and Bister together laid out new places and seated the guests; and Bister, at the shoulder of the girl, found a chance to murmur: "Halcyone, you're really a darling!"

"I've never tasted anything half so good," she was saying a moment later. "Uncle Whitney, won't you have just a bit?"

"Nothing!" said the stern judge. "The matter on which we have come, young man——"

"It sounds like business," said Bister. "But we can't

talk business dry. You won't refuse a glass of cider, sir? Gregory, a glass of cider for Judge Postlethwaite."

"And you have left the Hall, Gregory?" said the judge grimly, submitting perforce to this hospitality.

"I have left the Hall, but not the Bisters, sir," said Gregory, filling the glass.

The judge seemed so upset by this neat reply that, with an instinctive gesture, he emptied the glass. It was filled instantly.

"Cider?" said the judge, turning up his eyes a little. "I've never tasted anything like this!"

"Muldoon's a magician," said Bister. "I'll have him send over a barrel to you. If he could get this stuff on the market, he'd have a fortune. I'm going to try to manage it for him!"

"Bootlegging?" cried the judge.

"A fellow has to do something," said Bister cheerfully. "And I'm in business now, you know."

"What business, Lindley?"

"Real estate, sir. I had great luck when I went to the city, to-day. I met Sammy Dent, of Dent and Wisner, and he wanted me in with them."

"And what do you know of real estate, my lad?" asked the judge.

"Not an infernal thing. But they tell me what's to be sold, and the prices; and I try to find a buyer. It isn't so hard."

"Don't think so, eh?"

"No. Landed one thing to-day. Warren Chandler rode out with me. The Chandlers want to buy a town house, you know; and Warren seemed interested in a

thing I had on the list. In the East Fifties. Just what he wants."

"Hold on!" said the judge. "We have a place there. The very thing for the Chandlers!"

"Send the story to Dent and Wisner, will you? Of course I'll try to sell it for you."

"Humph!" said the judge. "Of course they'd be glad to handle my stuff. But—well, a sale is a sale, and I'll do it! Why, Lindley, it may be that you *will* make a success in business, after all."

"It's a game," declared Bister. "Not up to fox hunting; but not bad fun if you can get in a kill, now and then, you know!"

"I wish you luck," said the judge, taking a second glass of the cider, and beginning to smile in spite of himself. "But now for the business that brings us here. You're not exactly in as prosperous a condition as you were the other day, Lindley, and Hal can't keep an expensive horse like Kempis as a gift from you, when——"

"I beg your pardon," said Bister. "I don't understand."

"Don't be proud, you young blockhead," said the judge, frowning.

"Do you like Kempis?" asked Bister pointblank of the girl.

"Oh, of course. But you see, Lindley—he's very well bred and could bring you in a——"

"You see," said Bister, "I schooled and trained Kempis myself, and one doesn't sell a horse after having worked over him, you know. Have you had any salad? Darley's the only man in the world who knows how to use garlic. Just enough to guess at but not to know!"

"I'll have another taste of that cider, Gregory," said the judge. "Delight—and wonderfully mild, Lindley, eh?"

"Like water, really," said Bister, with the strangest of looks at Gregory. And Gregory, behind the chair of the judge, winked deliberately and solemnly in return.

He filled the glass.

"It isn't such a bad idea, this," said the judge. "Cheap, Lindley, eh?"

"Muldoon wanted to give me the space for nothing. Now, judge, try one slice of this chicken, will you?"

"The cider's too good to be drunk alone," declared the judge. "A single slice! It may be the making of you, Lindley—this independent existence! Furniture a bit rusty, though. Look here—my attic is filled with stuff we can't use——"

"No," said Bister, "I can't take gifts. That's a principle with me now. I'm going shopping and stock up these rooms with chairs and what-nots. Chairs are about all I need."

"And rugs," said Halcyone."

"Well, a rug or two for winter weather."

"And curtains," said Halcyone.

"I forgot about that."

"And then you'll want to repaper the walls, or distemper them, or something."

"Look here," said Bister, "will you lend Halcyone to me to fix up my rooms, Judge Postlethwaite?"

"You should be lent sackcloth and ashes," said the judge. "You young rascal, I believe you take this whole matter as more of a lark than anything else."

The judge grew more cheerful. He had another glass —or was it two?—of that wonderful cider, which looked like nothing at all, which went down like perfumed water——

The judge passed from cheerfulness to confidence. He talked of the past. He talked of the future. He talked of the present. He talked of gray Mistral.

"Everything's in a tangle," said Bister. "Except that Mistral is entered, and they've quoted odds against him."

"Odds of what? Odds of what?" asked the judge.

"Two hundred to one—or anything you please," said Bister. "They don't seem to think much of the chances of my horse!"

"And you, Lindley?"

"Well, I bet fifty dollars for the sake of the principle of the thing," said Bister.

"Then you'll win ten thousand dollars on that bet! How very wonderful!" said Halcyone, reckoning the sum on the slender tips of her fingers.

The judge winked at Bister, and Bister winked at the judge.

"You never can tell," said the judge, and then laughed uproariously, at this presumed joke.

"But everything's tangled up," resumed Bister. "Lefty turned out a little rat, for sure, and ran away, and that leaves us stranded, with no one able to come near the brute of a horse."

"No one except you, Lindley!" said Halcyone. "Oh, and I think that you *will* try to handle him!"

"Don't worry about Lin," decided the judge, whose fund of good humor was now on such an established

basis that it refused to be disturbed. "Let the boy alone. The fact is, Lin, that she's so happy to-day that she has room in her heart to take in the troubles of the entire world. Shall I tell him, my dear? Don't make a face at me! Yes, I'll tell him. Why, you're to be a member of the family, you know. Lin, she's going to be married to Lynmouth."

"Ten thousand fits of damnation!" cried Bister, leaping to his feet.

"Eh, what? What?" exclaimed the judge, entirely baffled.

"Are you going to marry this darling girl," said Bister, "to that cold-blooded, rock-headed, fish-eyed fossil? Judge Postlethwaite, where's your judgment?"

Of course it was a most extravagant speech from one man to another, and particularly from such a young man to such an elderly one. The judge turned purple, became swollen of face, and then gasped: "Halcyone, start for the door!"

Halcyone started.

"As for you," said the judge, "you've turned the corner with me, just as you've turned it with the colonel. I hope that I never have to put eyes on you again. By the eternal God, when I let people know how you've dared to denounce your own cousin to the girl he is to marry ——"

"Oh, go tell him! Publish it in the paper!" said the terrible Bister. "But don't be an infernal bore about it! If you're going to sacrifice her to that wooden-hearted image of a man, I suppose that you'll do it if you can. But good God, sir, aren't there other old houses in the

county than Bister Hall? Can't you find one of the places with a *man* in it? Even an old one?"

The judge started to speak, but struck an impediment. He could find no words large enough! He went through a few of his most effective courtroom and stump gestures, but finally his arms fell rather helplessly to his sides.

He could merely stammer: "This is a thing to dr-d-d—dream about, Lindley Bister, but never to believe, by heaven! It would never be credited if I should report the fact exactly as it has happened."

Young Lindley Bister seemed to have gone quite mad, in fact, for he advanced almost threateningly on the older man and added to his recent insults: "I'll tell you what! I won't let you marry her to that sap."

"You which?" began Mr. Postlethwaite. "You won't —you what?"

"I won't let you chuck her away on that trained sea lion on his chunk of ice," said Lindley Bister. "I'm going to save her, by God."

"You'll save her? The boy's mad! Completely mad! You'll do what, Lindley Bister?"

"By God," said Bister, "I'll tell you what! I'll go ask her to marry me, myself. I'll make love to her. I'll cut out that corn-fed ox, that Sunday-school text, that four-flushing—oh, what's the use!"

The judge seemed to agree that after all there was not the slightest thing to be gained by further conversation, and he blundered blindly down the steps. Near the bottom of them, as he gasped and panted along, Bister overtook him and caught his arm.

"I want to apologize," said Bister.

"You un-bred puppy!" cried the judge.

"For speaking to you like that in my own rooms. But as for what I said, every word of its goes!"

So, with a wordless roar, the judge issued upon the sidewalk and plunged into his roadster, where Halcyone was curled up in her place, weeping bitterly.

The wrath of the judge was increased by this touching spectacle. But still his vocabulary could not match the heat within him until he was almost halfway to his house. The wind had cut half the fumes of fury from his mind, by that time and he was able to express his opinion of Lindley Bister in some long, involved, but weighty sentences. He spoke in the manner that he had used when he sent criminals to the electric chair, in other days.

And still Halcyone wept.

"To have denounced his own cousin—pure jealousy —scoundrelly, back-stabbing jealousy, Halcyone! I never suspected that there was such black malice in any Bister!"

And still Halcyone wept.

"My dear girl, no wonder you're upset. I'm a little unsettled myself. I've loved that boy, Hal. He had a place in my heart. Drink and low companions. You see what they do."

Halcyone wept on, trembling with her strong sobbing.

"The impudent villain—you'll hardly believe it! He said that he would prevent your marriage with Lynmouth!"

"Oh!" cried Halcyone, and sat upright.

"Never let the growling of such a cub worry you," said

the judge. "What? Interfere? The impertinent young fool swore that he would make love to you himself."

"Really!" said Halcyone.

"No wonder you're stunned, my dear child," said the judge. "But trust it all to me. Of course, he was simply speaking in a jealous passion."

But all the rest of the way, Halcyone said not a word, but sat staring at the vague blackness, far down the road, or the stars which shone faint and small near the horizon.

CHAPTER XXVII

Four sweating, gasping, exhausted men stood near the corral of Mistral. That valiant horse had been saddled after a desperate struggle, but he had bucked Lindley Bister over the nine-foot bar which topped the big fence, and then he had bucked and fought and torn and rolled off the saddle, and pounded it to a shapless pulp. Now he thrust his head through the bars and studied the group with heaving sides and pricked ears, while the dust cloud of his raising blew softly and sadly far away cross the cornfield.

There was no conversation among the men. Bister, terribly shaken and still seeing double, leaned on the broad shoulder of Mike Divine, and Tim McFarland, almost knocked out by a glancing kick, was supported by Tod Loomis.

"What's next?" asked Loomis, shaking his head.

"One of three things can happen," said Bister through his teeth. "I'll ride him in the Point-to-point, or he'll kill me, or I'll kill him. Get out another saddle, Tod, and we'll go after him again."

A snarling, nasal voice said from the rear: "I know where I'd place my bet."

They turned and confronted the slender, slouching form of Lefty.

"The rat's come back!" said Divine. "You win your bet on that, Mr. Lindley."

Young Lefty walked up to his master and eyed him up and down.

"Did you lay a bet that I'd come back?" he asked.

"I did, Lefty," said Bister, smiling at this rank impertinence.

"You're a queer guy," declared Lefty. "But maybe you know me better than I know myself. The odds was about one to ten agin you. But about Mistral—say, why don't you try him without a saddle?"

"That's one of his damned smart-cracks," said Divine. "I'm gunna give that brat a hiding, before I'm finished with him!"

"Keep away from him, Mike," commanded Bister.

He took Lefty to one side.

"Youngster," he said, "I think that you're going straight!"

"Aw, how'n hell do I know?" said Lefty, annoyed. "Anyway, I've sent the coin to those birds."

Bister nodded.

"Do you mean what you say about trying Mistral without a saddle?"

Lefty looked suddenly away, and flushed a little.

"I mean it," he muttered. "Maybe——"

He turned on his heel and walked off.

"Come back here!" yelled Tod Loomis, "and help us get a saddle on Mistral!"

Lefty went on without giving them heed, and as Loomis in a fury rushed after him, Bister caught the groom and held him back.

"Lefty's given us something out of the bottom of his

heart," he said. "At least, I think he has! We'll get Mistral snubbed to a post again, to begin with."

It was by no means as easily done as said. Mistral was like a great wild-footed cat, leaping back and forth in the corral, dodging the ropes which were thrown at his head, but finally he was noosed and worked up to a post until he could not budge his head. Then Bister climbed the fence above the stallion. He told the rest to keep the saddle away, and reaching through the bars, he laid his hand on the wet saddle mark on Mistral's back. The stallion strove to buck it off, and squealed with impotent rage as he twisted and squirmed.

"You fellows go rest in the shade," said Bister. "This is a one-man job, and a long one!"

How long a job, indeed!

For hours on end, when the others looked out, it seemed to them that neither man nor horse had stirred. But to Bister, every moment of that long interval was crowded with meaning, for it was as though he had his hand on the back of a tiger; under the touch of his fingers the great horse winced, and the skin of his back wrinkled and twitched spasmodically. It was as though the very essence of his being revolted against the nearness of this creature, man.

Noon came; and the stallion no longer shrank from the hand. So Bister called for water, and went to the head of the stallion. Instantly the short, nervous ears went back and the devil looked at Bister out of those reddened eyes.

Loomis came hurrying with water in a pail, but a

small, snarling called from the side: "Leave the water go, will ya?"

It was Lefty, and Bister hearkened as to a prophet.

Waterless went the stallion through the heat of the day. And later, when Bister would have loosed the head of the great horse, once more Lefty looked up from his book and growled: "Aw, leave him be. It'll help him to think, maybe!"

Tied short, forced to stand without moving, burning with thirst, the head of Mistral began to droop before the afternoon was ended; the evening came cool, at last.

"If you hobble his feet, maybe you could take him into the stall," said Lefty.

Bister, listening, nodded again. All the day he had been striving to reach for the significance behind the words of the boy. It was plain to him that Lefty knew something about Mistral that no other understood, but what the hidden thing could be he fumbled in vain to guess.

However, all unaided he managed at risk of life and limb to get short hobbles on the legs of the stallion, and then with a long rope on the neck of Mistral, he unfastened the housing which held the head of the gray.

Instantly the great horse charged; and crashed into the corral dust. Tod Loomis and Tim McFarland, standing by with anxious faces, would have come to help, but Bister waved them off. Something was to be gained, it appeared, if he, unaided, could get the stallion into the stable. So he helped the forehand of Mistral with all his might and the big fellow managed to struggle to his feet once more.

He did not attempt to charge again, but slowly and painfully he walked behind Bister and entered the stable, and was brought into the great, roomy box stall. Tod Loomis had climbed into the loft to throw down a feed of hay.

"Let it be, Tod," called Bister. "Nobody lifts a hand for this horse except myself!"

So he watered and fed Mistral.

He could never forget how he gave the bucket to the stallion, and how Mistral drank, snatching his head up from the pail a dozen times to stare at the man, and trembling from head to foot as he reached down to drink again.

It snapped a force of anger and hate in Bister to watch this. For surely some wrong had been done to Mistral, in the beginning. He began to talk, softly, soothingly; and the ears of Mistral quivered forward a hundred times to listen. And a hundred times he stopped eating to turn his head as far as his rope would permit and study the face of his master.

Supper hour came; Bister had food brought to him and ate in the stall; bedtime came, and Bister had his blanket put down next to the partition.

Now all these hours, Lefty had never departed from a post of vantage, but now he drawled: "Yeah, maybe you understand!" and he went to find his own bunk.

That night Mistral did not lie down; but twenty times he started violently with stamping feet, and twenty times Bister wakened and spoke, until the nervousness had passed. The next day, the Divines had sight of a hobbled

horse in the pasture, with one end of a long rope held by Lindley Bister.

In the afternoon the gray was brought into the corral, and Bister dropped gently on to the bare back of the stallion. As though fire had settled on him, Mistral reared, tangled his legs in the hobbles, and crashed backwards. Bister patiently helped him to his feet, and mounted once more. And this time, as though knowing that the thing was inevitable, Mistral simply waited with braced legs, waited in a half-crouch, trembling with utter disgust, and utter horror.

The weight descended from the fence above him; the rider was once more in place. And by degrees Mistral straightened and stood his full height; for over his flanks and along his taut neck went the hand of the man, and the ceaseless voice of the man was in his ear, carrying some message. At least, it was not a message of hate; it was not even a word of command! Neither did the rider cling to his body with tearing spurs or flog with a cutting whip.

These things Bister was dimly perceiving, for he was entering the soul of the stallion as one enters an undiscovered country of great extent, and filled with dark wildernesses. A change of tone, a sudden gesture was enough to cause that glorious head to be thrown up and the wildness fired in the eyes once more.

But all that day and the next, Bister lived with the gray, talked to him, groomed him, fed and watered him. There was never a time when the horse did not shrink from his first touch; and rarely a time when he did not

tremble at the second; but still Bister felt that he was making his way—yet slowly, slowly!

There was a point, apparently, past which he could not step. He consulted Lefty.

"I don't think that time will ever beat him, Lefty," said he. "What can I do to break him—win him over, I mean!"

Now Lefty, all these days, had never been far away, but his narrow eyes were constantly studying horse and master from a distance, whether Bister held the tether in the pasture or sat on the bare back of Mistral in the corral.

He had not offered a word of advice, after the first day, but now he burst out angrily: "I've brought you up to the wishing gate. You can do the rest yourself, I guess!"

Bister was too tired to argue; a little too tired even to deliver a reprimand, for night and day, as he lived with Mistral, he had felt something pouring out of his mind, his heart, his spirit, and flowing towards the great stallion. How much of it entered, that he could not guess. But at least it was certain that the expense of soul was there! So now he turned gloomily away and had gone halfway back to the stable when Lefty came after him.

"Look here," said Lefty, "you're gunna ride him in the Point-to-Point, or else you'll die tryin'? Is that it?"

"That's it," said Bister.

"Then," said Lefty, "I dunno that there's any reason why you shouldn't try your hand now. Might as well die now as then, I suppose!"

It was rather a puzzle for Bister. A saddle had been expressly forbidden by Lefty; now he bade his master make the test. What Bister decided on was strange enough. And yet it was the natural result of his long labors over the horse. It was not skill or craft that could change Mistral, but something in the nature of his horse-soul, which would yield or not yield to the influence of man. So Bister, with his sense of fear and his love of life weakened by fatigue, led Mistral into the corral and there he removed the hobbles with his own hand and stripped the headstall from the gray.

After that, he stood in the center of the corral to watch and wait.

It seemed to him, at first, that Mistral would attempt nothing whatever, but the monster merely shook himself like a dog, once or twice, and then sniffed the place where the ropes had chafed his legs. But, raising his head, he spied Bister standing with empty hands in the center of the corral, and with a sharp squeal of anger, he charged.

Flight could not save Bister, then; so he folded his arms, rather statuesquely, and waited. The gray flash leaped at him as though to rend him with its teeth; then, changing mind, reared to batter him to death with the mighty iron-shod hoofs.

Be sure that that shadow fell upon the very soul of Bister. Then it dropped away, and the sun blinded his eyes, for Mistral had swerved to the side at the last instant, and in one bound reached the farther side of the corral, where he flung around and stared at the man, with loftily raised front, and braced forelegs.

He charged again, but this time he swerved well before he reached the shadow of the master—swerved and kicked out like a foolish colt in passing. And after that, he began to make a game of it, pretending to graze, with his back turned to the man, and then whirling like lightning, a shudder of silver going down his flanks as he flashed about.

Bister had not moved, but now he began to talk, and held out his hand. Mistral, ears back, shook his head in angry impatience and turned his back again. But the voice persisted, and at last the horse began to approach, stealthily, like a stalking cat, more or less. He came to the extended hand of Bister, and crouched a little, more frightened than dangerous, now, ready to spring either back or to the side.

But Bister was saying with a trembling voice, softly:

"You can dodge me and kick at my shadow or lay back your ears, but I've got you, Mistral. Do you see that hand? In the hollow of it I've got you. I'll ride you before the week's out, you beauty. I'll ride you with loose reins. Mistral, do you hear me?"

A loud, startled voice—the voice of Mike Divine—cried out: "God love! Betsy, come look!"

Mistral, wildly startled, whirled about to face the new danger, and so whirling, he crowded close against the side of Bister, and allowed the arm of his master to pass over his neck. So he confronted whatever terror might approach.

A vast wave of fatigue came over Bister, swallowing even his sense of triumph; and that night when he lay

down beside the stall of Mistral he vowed that nothing but a thunderclap could waken him.

He did, however, waken to a smaller sound—a choked, and broken sound, and raising his head, he saw the unmistakable, round-shouldered silhouette of Lefty standing at Mistral's door, and weeping like a child.

"Steady, Lefty," said he. "It doesn't mean that I've taken him away from you. We'll have him in partnership!"

"Aw, leave me be!" cried Lefty. "You've got him without a saddle, but you ain't got him *with* a saddle, and you never will. He'll beat you yet, damn you; he'll beat you yet!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

When Bister wakened in the morning, he was not entirely sure that the thing had not been a dream, but before he had finished breakfast, his mind was clear. Lefty was a sullen, down-headed figure, who stabbed blindly at his ham and eggs and drank much black coffee, snarling wolfishly at Mrs. Divine when that fat lady remonstrated: "You'll be after eatin' out the insides of you with all that black stuff, sonny!" But no matter how Bister looked at him, Lefty would not meet his eye; and Bister was worried, indeed.

Otherwise, he would have been in a seventh heaven. Not only because he had gone two-thirds of the way, apparently, in his conquest of Mistral, but because there was a great change in the attitude of the men towards him. There had never been a time when they had not regarded him with affection and all the air of good fellowship, but now it was different; for there was added a strong touch of awe. Tim McFarland and Tod Loomis were dumb; but Mike Divine managed to say towards the end of breakfast: "Now, will you be tellin' me, Mr. Lindley—was it just with your eye that you beat that devil, when he come for you, or was it somethin' that you said to him?"

"Be still, man; be still, Mike!" commanded his spouse. "Would you be havin' a secret like that out of Mr. Lindley, from the bigness of his heart—which God knows

stands wider open than two barndoors? Would you be havin' his secret from him, and him maybe apt to be needin' all the secrets of every trade that he can lay hand on, poor darlin'?"

"There was no secret at all, Mike," said Bister truthfully. "I was simply tired of the long fight. I wanted to have it over. So I let him have his chance at me. And God gave me the luck. That's all!"

Mike Divine looked at Tod Loomis, and Loomis looked at McFarland, and they smiled at one another, subtly. It was plain that they felt there was more than this behind the affair, but they would not press too hard to get at such a miraculous secret. And indeed, even at this short distance, Bister began to feel that there had been something more than chance in the matter. What had happened when the stallion charged him he could not tell. But he felt that a divine power must have been given to him that instant.

He sent Tod away after breakfast to bring over as many old saddles as he could lay hands on, and Tod returned from Borrogate in a few minutes with a dozen battered, tattered cartoons of saddles. One by one Bister took them into the corral, and threw them down. The first one, Mistral leaped on with a squeal of rage, ripped it from pommel to cantle with one strong wrench of his teeth, trampled it, tossed it, and kicked the pulpy remains far across the fence. The second and the third he served in the same manner. But the fourth he went at less savagely; and it was only half-destroyed when he walked away from it and sniffed the fifth of those detested inventions as Bister held it in his hand. From

pommel to stirrup irons he snuffed the thing, and then raised his head and looked his master in the face with a puzzled inquiry. It was obvious that he could not make head or tail of the mystery. But by incantation, it seemed, the man had extracted some of the horror from saddles in general.

Half an hour later, Bister with his own hands had a saddle on the back of the stallion. A dozen times, the gray had whirled to sniff at it, and even to catch a stirrup leather with his teeth, but he had proved that saddles need not be such really treacherous and mortal enemies. He had battered and rent and torn them to his heart's full satisfaction this very afternoon, and finally he allowed the cinches to be drawn taut. Without the slightest dancing or prancing he permitted Bister to swing, then, into the saddle.

For a moment, Bister could only sit in his place, trembling; then he called huskily: "Open the gate, Tod; Open the gate! Now comes the real trial! Can I gallop him and still keep him in hand?"

Mistral went through the gate, making a pass at Divine with his snaky head and flirting his heels at Loomis; but then he gave his head to the hand and voice of his master and jogged towards the low hedge that fenced the pasture. Not an instant's pause made he, but tossed across the hedge and galloped across the meadow lightly, lightly —and swung this way, and then that, and circled, and checked to a trot, and slowed to a canter, and sprang away again at full gallop—answering every sign upon the reins, with Bister blind and delirious with joy in the saddle.

Just before them the land was checkered with hedges and fences which separated the little holdings of small farmers, and Bister aimed straight at the midst of the tangle. Like foam on the head of a wave he was dipping up and down—but like a wave the motion was mysteriously even, soft, and light, with such a rhythm in it as should be told in music and verse.

Across that fence-tangle and there stretched before them long, softly rolling slopes—and Mistral hardly breathing from his last exertions.

Ay, the gray could fence like magic—thanks to God and the cunning horseman who first taught him the craft in far away Kentucky. There was the word of Bunce about his foot on the flat, but now to test it.

He took up the pull to just that point which means speed to any thoroughbred that ever trod turf, and Mistral came into his hand with breathless suddenness. Beneath him, he felt the gather and thrust of the mighty quarters, and the wind was stinging his eyes.

Not riding, but flying! Already a fence before them! They soared into the heart of the blue sky, water glinted below, and again running without break or flaw. Was this the limit?

He slapped the shoulder of the stallion, and was nearly jerked out of the saddle by the response! Running? No, that had been a mere pleasure canter, it seemed. But this—this settling towards the ground, this thrusting of a piston that ever lunged forward and never needed to recover—this sense like the throb and pulse of great wings —this unfathomable lightness—this was the running of Mistral.

A dike and a well-known, gaping ditch beyond it jerked suddenly up before his eyes; too late to turn! So he raised the great horse at it, and waited, cold with fear. No, let those fear who have not wings to buoy them! Over they went, and the dreadful shadow of the ditch was flicked behind them.

They entered a wood, and like a hunted tiger the stallion swerved among the trees, skimming them right and left, then dodging, catlike, but never losing momentum. It would have been a feat to stay in the saddle on another horse, but not on Mistral, for he ran with never a jerk or a jar, doing all that he was capable of doing with a silky ease.

And now they left the woods, with an upward sweep of lawns, the broad, low, comfortable façade of the judge's house before them.

He stopped the horse and got off to take stock. It had been a mighty burst, and a sustained one. He looked to the legs, first. There was not so much as a tremor. Half sick with anxiety, he pressed his ear close to the throat—but there was not a sound. He stepped back and stared into the eyes of the giant, and Mistral moved up to him, and reached playfully at his shoulder.

Reverence came to Bister. He looked up—shall we admit that it was the first time in his life?

"Perfect, by the eternal God!" said Bister. "Perfect, perfect!"

"Yes," said the voice of Halcyone Tiverton. "Perfect!"

He turned with a start and faced her.

"One doesn't have to know horses to know that he's perfect," said Halcyone. "Out of my window, I saw

him flying the dike and the ditch. And oh, Lindley, this is the horse that was to kill you!"

She laughed, but rather weakly.

He turned his back on her and devoured the horse with his eyes.

"You won't talk about this, Hal? I'm going to bet my shoe-strings on him, and if I can place the money before a tip gets to town—you know—I'll have the sweetest odds in the world!"

"I'll be dumb. How does it feel to have done such a great thing?"

"I haven't done it. Oh, no, he was made years ago. But I had the tip partly from Lefty. And so—why, it was just patience and work that it required. And now —well, I can't tell you how it feels, Hal. I—I'd like to put you up there in the saddle and let you try him. Do you want to?"

She glanced aside at him. He was entirely in earnest.

"I've only done side-saddle," said she.

"Ah, that's a shame. Well, suppose that you were sitting on Pegasus—on a pair of wings—you understand, Hal?"

"That was how you looked!"

"I'll tell you, Hal, this glorious blue sky so full of sun, and all the fire and gold on the trees—why, it only seems a dull sort of setting for Mistral, to me. He's so much finer and more beautiful than anything in the world."

"I think he is," said Halcyone.

"And bravest thing in the world, Hal!"

"Almost," said she, looking at him aside.

"And—look here, Hal, it seems about the right and fitting thing that I should meet you at the end of my first ride on him; because, by heaven, you're about the only person in the world that's fine enough to understand!"

"I don't know a thing about horses," said Halcyone, looking straight before her.

"Oh, that's only part. But I mean, you're so damned straight and clean and good, Hal, you see? Most people, they've got a sooty, smoky flavor about 'em. The things they've done stick to 'em. You understand? But by gad, you're different. Nothing has ever stained you, and nothing ever could! And besides, you're so easy to look at. Why, if you were standing there beside Mistral, old thing—I'd hardly know which of you to choose. That's a fact! Good Lord, that was a silly thing to say. You're not angry, are you?"

"I'm not a bit," said Halcyone.

"You're so terribly red that I thought maybe you were."

"You have such a headlong way about you, Lindley," said she, "that it rather takes my breath away. That's all."

"Have I?" he asked, meditating. "Well, I'm rough, I suppose. Ah, I've almost forgotten about the other night. What a complete cad and rotter you must think me for breaking out that way about Jack! Only, I give you my word it wasn't jealousy. Not a bit, really. He's welcome to Bister Hall. Oh, I feel mean about it. I really hate Jack, you understand, and I've told him so. But what got under my skin last night was thinking of that statue of frost, and then looking across the table and

seeing you sitting there like—like—like a confounded flower, or an angel, or something like that! You've no idea, Hal, how happy it made me seeing you there. And watching you eat chicken at my table, and lettuce. Gad, I don't know why that warmed my heart so much. Lynmouth to have you! Bah! He'll preserve you in ice. Besides, you're only a baby!"

"I'm nearly twenty, Lin."

"You? You're only sixteen or seventeen!"

"Lindley Bister, I'm away past eighteen!"

"You can't even ride a horse," said Bister, "and they talk of having you marry! I never heard of such nonsense!"

"You're not a bit fair!" said she. "Do you see that fence—that great big fence right down there?"

"Well, I see it."

"I jumped that on Kempis, this very morning!"

"Hal, you're a little liar. You are—a complete little liar!"

"Lindley, I *hate* you when you talk like this!"

"Did you take Kempis over that?"

"No, Kempis took me," she admitted.

"By jove," said Bister, "you *are* a little brick!"

"I hope that I'm not a baby," said she.

"Look here, though. Are you going to marry Jack Lynmouth?"

"I've said that I shall," replied she.

He paused and cut at the grass with his riding crop; and then he sighed.

"It makes me frightfuly sick," said Bister.

"Does it?" she asked, wonderfully innocent. "Uncle Whitney wants it, you know."

"The old fossil!" cried Bister. "You and Lynmouth? Bah! Why, what can he do with you?"

"It would break Uncle Whitney's heart if I refused," said Halcyone.

"Let it break, then. Brittle hearts aren't worth having. Besides, it wouldn't. Why, good God, you ought to marry a man, not a statue! Has Jack talked to you about it?"

"He's coming over to-day," said Halcyone.

"I know how he'll go at it," sneered Bister, and he mocked bitterly: " 'Colonel Bister has suggested that I call on you to make a proposal for an alliance, Miss Tiverton, and although I've known you for such a short time —' Oh, damn it, don't you see how he'll carry on? Simply disgusting!"

"After all, he hasn't known me very well, you know."

"As well as I have, about. But he never could know anyone well, except himself, the fish! Now, look here, you promise me that you won't take on that blighter!"

"I don't know what to say to Uncle Whitney—he's so set on it. He's planned it for years, you know! And who should I wait for, Lindley?"

"Wait for a man that'll begin by telling you something about yourself—how beautiful you are, Hal. God bless me, I could talk to you about that! Because you are. Absolutely delicious, Hal. Now, you give me that promise!"

"Halcyone!" called a deep, strong voice.

The judge came towards them up the lawn.

"Poor girl!" said Bister. "Your eyes are full of tears. The judge is simply a scoundrel! Are you so afraid of him?"

"I'm not even thinking of him," said Halcyone.

"I'm going to come around again and ask you for your answer. I've got to get off, now, before the judge gives me a hiding. Good-bye, Hal, old dear."

"Good-bye, Lindley."

He swept off through the trees.

And so the judge came panting up the slope.

"Hal, didn't you hear me calling? Who was that? Was it possibly Bister on that devilish Mistral?"

"Yes, Uncle Whitney."

"It was, eh? Why the devil didn't he wait and talk to me? D'you know what he did, yesterday? Most idiotic, heroic thing in the world! But he told you how he handled the horse, of course!"

"No, he didn't. He—he was very confusing, Uncle Whitney."

"Why, Hal, listen to me. He turned the brute loose in a corral and stood in the middle. By God, a most nerve-racking thing to think of! Stood there in the center of the corral and let the beast charge him. Yes, Hal, with empty hands. Zounds! Stood there and faced the brute, and Mistral reared over him to smash him to bits—and at the last minute swerved. Charged him again, and then drew off—and ten minutes later he was eating out of Lindley's hand! That's the Bister blood. Glorious thing. I would have given ten years of life to see it, eh? But what's this? Are you crying?"

That question seemed to turn on fountains. She clung to the judge and sobbed with violence.

"What's the matter?" he gasped. "What's the matter, child?"

"Nothing!" sobbed Halcyone.

"Has that idiot boy been saying something disagreeable to you? The infernal puppy!"

"No!"

"Are you sick, dear?"

"No!"

"But what's the matter, honey?"

"Oh, Uncle Whitney, I don't know. But I jus' want to die! I jus' want to die!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THROUGH a dream of happiness, Bister regained the house of Mike Divine. All the world was transformed. The white clouds blowing from behind the hills were tumbling and tossing for joy of riding the wind, and the sun shone torrents of yellow diamonds that lay in handfuls on the grass, or glistered continually on the surface of every creek; and Mike Divine's house itself was surrounded with a sort of halo. For it was here that Mistral had come to know a master, at last. And accordingly, nature had poured forth all her autumn gold and crimson and purple with most lavish hand around the house. It spilled from the upper slopes and trickled blinding bright into the hollows.

Out of the fullness of his heart, he was singing as he entered the driveway, that mellow ballad of the Dapple Hound and the Peterby Fox, and Loomis and the rest came out to receive him. They did not speak. They did not have to. For that ringing song answered every question before it could be asked.

With his own hands he dressed the stallion, watered him, fed him, rubbed him down again to make sure; and turned half a dozen times to run back to the stall and fill his eyes with a last glance before he got to the house and could sit down to eat his lunch.

"Darley, sir," said Tod Loomis, "is a little sad these

days because you aren't eating at your own rooms. He's had every meal waiting for you, sir."

"Good old Darley!" said Bister. "Tod, what a wonderful lot of good fellows there are in the world! Mrs. Divine, have you another one of those pork chops?"

"Bless your heart, sir, there's tons of 'em. Are they good?"

"The best pork chops, Mrs. Divine, that I ever tasted —the best and the best cooked! If you were to open a tavern, I'd leave Muldoon's!"

"Ah, sir, this house is a tavern to you where no charges'll ever be made so long as Mike Divine draws breath!"

"Get out the roadster, Tim," ordered Bister. "We're going to the city as fast as the old boat will float us. We have to lay our bets. Are you boys backing Mistral for a penny?"

At this, they looked at one another again, but in a different fashion.

"Will you lay a twenty for me, sir?" said Loomis.

"And for me?" chimed in the others.

"Only twenties?" smiled Bister. "Well, boys, you didn't see him flying the country. I don't blame you. Besides, there'll be some good things in that race."

"D'you know how good, sir?" asked Tod Loomis.

"Tell me, then."

"Swinney and Chalmers have put in Croix d'Or."

"The old steeplechaser?"

"Not so old, either! The Briar Lawn stables have in Dr. Crook. And Major Cheney has put up Suetonius himself!"

"Ah!" groaned Bister. "You'll be telling me in another minute that they've got Lapwing and Musketeer against me, too!"

"That's the very thing you have to face, sir."

"What? Both of 'em?"

"You've been paying so much attention to Mistral that you've never noticed the work he'll have to do. They've laid out the five most devilish miles you ever saw; enough to beat most horseflesh before the race even starts. And then the horses——"

"The harder the course, the better," said Bister. "I'll tell you, Mistral has something more than four legs. He has a brain, lads. And brains get you as far as legs across country, eh?"

"Ay, but there's something more than country to beat. I've only named the cream of the field to you."

"Lapwing and Musketeer!" said Bister with a sigh. "I admit that's more than I gambled on! How do they come in?"

"Mr. Philip Osborne and Mr. Ned Sherdon swore that the professionals shouldn't have the thing to themselves. They decided to burn up money if they had to; but they'll win the race for the county. And so they went out to buy. Mr. Osborne paid I don't know what for Musketeer. And Mr. Sherdon went to a hundred thousand for Lapwing, it's said."

"The Sherdon's are the right stuff," said Bister slowly, making the concession to the old rivals of the Bisters in that county. "But I didn't think that even the Sherdon's would go quite as high as that. Unless there's an accident, I think that race goes to Lapwing, you know!"

"Ay, sir," put in Mike Divine, "and don't go breakin' yourself on the gray, sir. He's a beauty; he's got all the looks in the world. But after all, y'understand how it is? He ain't a hundred thousand dollar horse, sir!"

"Neither was Lapwing," said Bister, "before he won a single race."

"And no early trainin'," said Tim McFarland. "Nothin' to give him foot, sir!"

"He did have it, though. His breeder trained him as a two-year old, you know."

"Don't go opposin' a Bister!" said Mrs. Divine. "Was there ever a one of the darlin's that could be drove with a whip? Oh, Mr. Lindley, be keepin' your wits with you, will you? Money ain't a homin' pigeon. You can't trust it to come back!"

"I'll tell you what," said Bister, "if you had seen the horse work, you wouldn't feel quite this way. Well, Lapwing is a fast one; and Musketeer can stay forever. But with luck and Mistral under me, I'll beat 'em for you!"

"*I*", said Kitty, with a sudden decision, "am going to hock this little old emerald and bet every penny I get out of it on Mistral!"

"Good girl!" said Bister. "That's courage. But look here, Kitty—suppose you only bet one-half? I'm gone!"

Off he went, as fast as the powerful motor could shoot him over the road, and in the city he began those familiar rounds on the trail of which many a fat fortune had disappeared. He went to Silvester, a little gray man with a thin face of iron. The books of Mr. Silvester were open on the Borrogate Point-to-point.

"And on Mistral?"

"That's the bad actor?" queried Silvester. "Also, it's your horse, sir?"

"Yes."

"It was a hundred to one this morning against that horse, sir. I suppose we can call it that, still?"

And his eyes flashed into the heart of Bister.

"What will you take, Silvester?"

"You'd better try to pay the bet, first."

"Say a thousand, Silvester."

The latter merely smiled; a very faint smile.

"Say a hundred," said he. "That's about enough."

"How would a thousand work out?"

It worked out much thinner, to be sure. But before Bister left the place, he had laid his thousand, and the average price was sixty-to-one.

He went on to Gray, and that gentleman took fifteen hundred at odds of forty-to-one. Somehow, the odds were shortening in spite of himself.

It left Bister with a fortune of forty-five hundred dollars, aside from a little to pay running expenses, and with that he went to the great Rudy O'Dowd, a ruffian and a villain, but one whose word was good for any sum, so heavily was he backed.

"Mistral?" said O'Dowd. "I'll give you decent odds. Thirty to one, say?"

"Man, man!" cried Bister. "He's a green horse—never run in his life! And you offer me only thirty to one? Come, come, O'Dowd!"

"Cross-country stuff is harder to figure than the distance to one of them new stars that the papers are talking about lately," declared O'Dowd. "That's a fact, sir. What do you want?"

"I have forty-five hundred. What will you give me for that?"

"A hundred thousand, Mr. Bister."

"Confounded robbery, O'Dowd, and you know it."

He started for the door.

"Come back here!" said O'Dowd. Bister turned, and found the savage, brutal face glaring at him, but with a twinkle of good humor in the eyes.

"I'm trying to work it out," said O'Dowd frankly. "You're not a crack, but you know horses. And you're willing to bet all you own. That ought to mean something fairly short. On the other hand, the horse is bad, not trained since a two-year old, never run a race, short time to train for the Point-to-point, and has the stiffest competition in the country to go up against. Besides, you're a fellow who would look at ten thousand dollars as next to nothing; and you'd try to make it half a million or nothing. You're the type that plays long shots, if I ever saw one! And that ought to make the chance a long one! I have to balance the two ideas, one against the other, you understand?"

"Balance them, then," said Bister. "Balance them, by all means, and let me know how the beam swings."

O'Dowd look at the ceiling.

"I'll give you thirty to one for that money," said he; "thirty to one for all of it. That's a hundred and thirty-five thousand if you win."

"I thought of a hundred to one for everything," said Bister, deep in gloom. "But I have to take what I get. Write out the ticket!"

He left his cash behind him and hurried from the town; for it seemed a black day, under the shadow of

the drifting smoke-wreaths. But when he crossed the river he entered a new, clear, rosy atmosphere, and he clapped McFarland on the shoulder.

"Look yonder, Tim."

"At what, sir?"

"At the whole infernal world, man. Did you ever see anything half so fine in your entire life?"

"It's a very bright autumn," agreed McFarland.

"Mistral weather!" said Bister. "It's made to set him off. A diamond set in gold, Tim. That's the idea! Tim!"

"Yes, sir."

"What odds would you quote against Mistral?"

"I couldn't quote odds against your horse, sir."

"No, but I want your honest opinion. What should the odds be?"

Tim raised his head and made gigantic calculations.

"About five hundred to one, sir."

"Five hun—do you mean that?"

"About that, sir."

"Well," said Bister after a moment's thought, "then the bookies are rare Jews. I begin to feel as though I were riding the favorite instead of an outsider. But you bring me back to zero, Tim. However, I wish that I had it to do over again."

"You wouldn't bet then, sir?"

"I would, Tim, but I'd pick different bookies. How fast can I hit the top of that hill?"

"At twenty, sir."

"At twenty-five, with this start. Now watch!"

And he stepped on the gas.

CHAPTER XXX

Jack Lynmouth, rising the next morning with the lark —for he kept in mind a certain old adage—took a brisk cross-country ride on Stand Pat, returned to the house, tubbed, breakfasted, and so waited on the colonel for that day's commands.

With each day they became briefer and briefer, these interviews.

"I want to be useful," Lynmouth had told the older man. "I want to take from your shoulders every burden of worry and care that you'll trust to me."

And, by degrees, the colonel opened to the youth all his mind concerning the management of the estate—the improvements to be made—and the great alterations which would be executed when Halcyone Tiverton brought seven millions to the hand of the heir of Bister Hall. For, of course, the estate would be made a model, then!

Mr. Lynmouth, with care, maintained his relation with the colonel on the side of respect, deference of youth to age, etc. He asked advice; he never offered it. He requested opinions; he never ventured them unless they were demanded. And then, usually, he begged a few hours for consideration.

So, on this morning, when he presented himself, he assumed his most cheerful smile, and stood by the table waiting for the colonel to speak.

"Now, damn it, boy, sit down!" said the colonel. "You act like a tiger trainer, and a green one, at that. I won't take your head off. Sit down! Have you proposed to Halcyone yet?"

"If you think this is the right time," said Lynmouth, "I'll telephone to ask if I may call this morning——"

"Do I think it's the right time? But what does your heart tell you, Jack?"

"It tells me that I should consult your greater experience, sir."

"Experience? With women? Bosh! Look here, lad. I've never had any experience with women. Horses—yes. But women? I knew my wife—sometimes. That's all. But usually even she was around the corner from me. Never could follow the whims and whimsies of the women, Jack. And the reason is, my boy, that I have a steady, quiet, logical mind."

"You have, sir," said Jack Lynmouth. "Of course, I've noticed that."

"Have you? Then you see farther into me than most of my friends do! However, let that go. What does your heart tell you about Halcyone?"

"As a matter of fact, sir, I've hardly consulted it. But if you suggest——"

"Hey? Not consulted it? Good God, Jack, are you going to make this marriage a sort of financial transaction? Signing of a bond—good-will—for value received —that sort of thing?"

The patience of Lynmouth was not even staggered by this assault. No, he was equipped with a mountain of strength. His eye remained bright, but modest. But he

banished his smile, to show that he could be grave when occasion demanded.

"This alliance with Miss Tiverton," he began——

"Confound that word!" said the colonel. "Alliance? It sounds like a bit of newspaper copy. What about Halcyone?"

"I've been looking towards the result rather than the actual marriage itself," said Lynmouth. "What overwhelms my imagination is the whole plan which you and Judge Postlethwaite have constructed so solidly, sir. I simply want to put my shoulder to the wheel——"

"Halcyone isn't a wheel. She's a dear girl, and needs to be handled like a lamb. Well, I like what you say, though. Yes, it's a great idea that we've given birth to. And it will leave its mark in the history of this county. It should establish the Bisters as on a rock for the next hundred years."

"With proper investment, yes, sir."

"The judge and I'll attend to that. But now to get on. You're going to see her?"

"I'll telephone——"

"No, don't do that. Drop in on 'em. Just drop in. Don't give her a chance to see the blow starting towards her. Then she may be able to dodge. Drop in, corner her; and in ten seconds you'll have her in your arms. Consider yourself a pirate, Jack, and Halcyone a clipper craft loaded with fine things from the Orient—you understand me? But if you stand off and hem and haw, she'll never take you, except to please the judge."

"Perhaps I'll have to depend on that, to an extent," suggested Lynmouth.

"Let her sell herself into an unhappy marriage to please an old fossil with one foot in his grave?" exclaimed the colonel. "I'd rather see both of you dead! No, no, love's the thing! Love's the thing that sweetens life! Five minutes of perfect love would give fragrance to fifty years in the desert. Never doubt that!"

"Perhaps it can be built up, later," said Lynmouth. "It's a thing that will grow, sir."

"Perhaps, perhaps," said the judge. "My wife and I fought for a month like cats and dogs. And we were happy ever after. But we'd been in love before we married, and that made it easier to fall in love again afterwards."

"Exactly, sir."

"Don't stand here and let the idea get cold. Go get her. Light a match and set yourself on fire. Get out, Jack! Ride your best horse over. Nothing like the gallop of a good horse to put words in the mind!"

Mr. Lynmouth retired, obediently mounted a horse, and galloped briskly out of Bister Hall.

On the main road, he let his mount drop back to a walk. He did not want the gallop of a horse to persuade words into his mind. He wanted the quiet contemplation of seven millions to add to his firmness of purpose. And as he rode, he indulged in a little daydreaming.

Not about Halcyone!

Yonder, in the valley, when the estate was in his hands, what a simple matter it would be to run up a few streets and crowd them with dainty houses. And then an electric tram could be run in to the railroad station. It would make a good deal of noise, but one would hardly hear it

in Bister Hall, unless the wind were blowing from that direction. It would make an ideal colony. For people who didn't have to get to offices until nine o'clock. Neither laborers nor the rich. But families who could own one car, two steps above a Ford. That was the class to hit, of course. One couldn't make big sales to them, but there would be many of them. A great principle of business!

He could see that first colony in the valley extending, growing. The full-page advertisements crowded through his mind. He even named the boulevards. He saw the houses climbing the slopes of the hills. He ought to get six thousand an acre, for all that land. It was not worth two hundred, now! And then the building of the houses —by the block. Lynmouth began to put forth the strong hands of his imagination and touch big money in his thoughts.

So he made a little gesture and banished the entire picture, for he was a firm disbeliever in counting chickens before they are hatched, and he never crossed bridges until he came to them. In the meantime, there was Halcyone. He had sketched the main lines of his interview with her, over and over again. He had rehearsed himself in it until he was sure of his lines. Now, having touched lightly on the main points, he pushed forward more briskly, and presently came in view of the Postlethwaite house. He should be able to sell that for a pretty figure. It needed an attractive name, for one thing. Something like Shadow Rest. Those names caught the rich idiots who were willing to spend money on atmosphere! He laughed a little at the thought. When the

colonel died—in four years—perhaps in five—then Mr. Jack Lynmouth saw himself drifting downtown in the morning in a burly limousine, his secretary beside him, dictating some of the more unimportant letters.

He gave his horse to a groom and paused a moment to admire a fine chestnut in the pasture, a tall, smooth-muscled thoroughbred of the best type.

"What horse is that?" he asked.

"That's Kempis, sir. The one Mr. Lindley Bister gave to Miss Halcyone——"

He turned his back in haste, to get away from the odd light which came into the eyes of the groom. It was very strange that all of the grooms and working men in the neighborhood were so fond of Lindley Bister; but, for that matter, the serving classes are always apt to be interested in lost causes, like this. Moreover, there was a touch of lowness, of the soil in Bister, and that appealed to the underlings. But as for Lynmouth, he felt that the majority of men are like stepping stones. They may be of use, but only when they are underfoot. And when a man possesses a certain sum of money—say seven millions, for instance—he's above criticism. At least, the critics can't get into the newspapers. Indeed, murder and divorce are about all that can besmudge a man's name. And Lynmouth felt that he was above any cardinal sin!

Coming in to the house, he literally stumbled on Halcyone in the garden, in an apron and a wide hat, and in torn, rough gloves, and a long scissors in her hands with which she was snipping and clipping at things in a wise and critical manner.

Her eyes grew big when she first saw him; but then she leaned hastily and began to snip again, rapidly.

"Hello, Mr. Lynmouth," said she.

There were two things about that speech which he didn't like. One was the formal title—surely they were past that stage!—and one was her casual tone. But he had noticed that people at work generally are casual. He was, himself.

He paused in the path, and she said without raising her head: "The judge is in the library, Mr. Lynmouth. Fine morning?"

"It is," said Lynmouth. "The fact is, I came to see you, Miss—Halcyone."

"Oh!" said Halcyone, and reached for another twig, her head still down. "That's nice," she added.

"And by the way, are we still last names to one another?"

"Not at all, Jack," said she, "if you wish."

"I do wish," said he. "And—can't we have a bit of a chat?"

"Of course," said Halcyone. "Go ahead, Jack!"

Still snipping!

There is a brusque something about the modern girl, a careless attitude of good fellowship, as though she had stripped from man his native mystery, so to speak. It would do for most boys and most flappers, but he decided instantly that it would never do in the wife of Jack Bister Lynmouth.

"As a matter of fact, it's something rather of importance," said he.

"Ah?" answered the girl. "You don't mind if I get

on with this pruning, though, do you? The gardener's sick, and this simply has to be done. Do you like flowers, Jack?"

"Extraordinarily fond of 'em," said Lynmouth, and coughed.

"And by the way, what *is* your last name, now? I understand it's to be changed?" suggested Halcyone.

He did not like that, either. Because the question was not quite as casual as it seemed. There was a chilly little overtone about it—claws under the velvet—that sort of thing.

And then, irritated—really angry—besides, she was in his hands, whether she wanted to be or not, through the agency of the judge—he plunged straight ahead. This would bring her head up, he hoped:

"Colonel Bister has proposed that I call on you, Halcyone——"

She did lift her head, then, and stared quite blankly at him. He could not make out why she should show much extreme surprise.

"Colonel Bister has suggested that I call on you and make a proposal for an alliance——"

Oh, wicked Fate! The very words had been suggested by the cunning tongue of Lindley Bister. They rang now like the voice of a ghost in her ears, and as though he were a spirit, she stared at Mr. Lynmouth.

"It really seems to strike you all of a heap," said he, biting his lip.

"Oh," said the girl, and she held out her hands to him helplessly, "are you going to do it, after all? Are you going to do it?"

"Ah? What?" gasped Lynmouth.

"Because I know you don't care about me," she said, advancing straight towards him. "And you know that I'm not fond of you. And—I have to make Uncle Whitney happy—and it's such a dreadful mess, if you're going to do it! Please, Jack, change your mind."

Mr. Lynmouth, plainly, was stunned. This speech was simply not in the play as it should be enacted. It was a rude bit of improvisation thrown in at the most awkward moment, throwing everything out of kilter. But he gathered himself together with a grip of iron. Seven million dollars!

"I'm not an orator. I can't make pretty speeches," said he. "I'm only a plain man, Halcyone. And so I can't tell you that even in these few meetings I've felt that you and I might——"

"No!" cried Halcyone.

And she closed her eyes and held up both her hands and her puckered face looked so childish and so unbeautiful that Lynmouth wanted to slap her and send her squawling into the house.

"You *are* going to go ahead with it!" moaned Halcyone. "And what shall I do?"

"Halcyone, you drive me to despair," said he with energy.

"I won't cry!" said Halcyone, gripping both her hands into fists. "I simply won't! Oh!"

"Of course," said Lynmouth, "I'd never dream of forcing myself on your attention. I'm sorry that—you'll pardon me for having troubled you, I know! And if——"

He was withdrawing, bowing, rejoicing bitterly in his

self-control and perfect poise, but she ran to him and caught him by the arm.

"Don't tell Uncle Whitney!" she pleaded. "But he'd have to know, and it would break his heart! Oh, God help me!"

He looked down at her in wonder. Once or twice on the stage he had seen something of this sort, but he had always been amused by its unreality; now it seemed that the thing wasn't so stagey, after all. There was real emotion in this girl. It made her pretty face a most unbeautiful mask. He thought of another thing which was usually said on the stage at such a time.

"Halcyone, may I ask you if this upsets you so much because you're interested in another man?"

"Interested?" cried Halcyone. "Interested? Oh, Jack, I'm in love—wildly, madly, desperately in love. There's a man I dream about. Night dreams and day dreams so real that his voice comes into my body and makes a tremor there like a real sound!"

"By gad," said Lynmouth, "it seems that I'm the villain of the piece. I really am! But look here, I don't want to drag you into anything. That's true."

"Then tell Colonel Bister that you can't love me. That you detest me. That if I had seventy millions instead of seven it would ruin your life to marry me!"

He thought of carrying that message back to the colonel, and he barely kept from smiling. Barely, and yet he succeeded. "I can't lie to him as well as that," said Lynmouth, "because I think that in time——"

"Don't say that!" she cried, stamping. "Oh, Jack, I

can't explain it to you. But it—but were you ever in love?"

"No," said he, "for the first time I——"

She broke in on him: "It's a dreadful thing. It's like homesickness and seasickness combined, sort of. You just can't fight against it. I think about it till I cry! And he treats me like a baby! I'm *not* a baby."

"I can't imagine a man with such an unreasonable attitude," said Lynmouth, almost sympathetically. "Can you tell me his name?"

"I *could* tell you," said she, "because then it would never get back to him. It's Lindley."

There is no punch in boxing that compares with the counter. It comes at the very moment when the other fellow is driving with all his might, full for a vital spot, intent on a knockout, perhaps. And the counter slips inside his guard and jars home with all the force of the stroke and the added impact of the other man's rush.

So it was with Lynmouth. He was quite ready for any other name in the world, but this caught him by blinding surprise. He had finished Bister so neatly and thoroughly and put him so entirely out of mind that now it was like the resurrection of a buried body. He had cut away the ground beneath the feet of Lindley Bister —and dropped him into the ample lap of seven million dollars!

"By gad," he murmured, when he could speak. "By gad," he added at once, "if it were any other man in the world, Halcyone—but I've got to be frank—about Lindley—why, I know him. And, honestly, he's not worthy!

You can't be permitted to throw yourself away on such a fellow. And besides, you say he treats you like a baby. Of course he does. He wants the chorus girl type. Like the Divine girl, he's so fond of. Of course he thinks you're a baby, and he always will."

She drew back from him a little, at that. She was still trembling, but most of the passion had died down, and she was able to think and reason again.

"Then nothing can stop you," said she. "You'll go ahead, won't you!"

"Why, Halcyone," he cried, the idea bringing a tremor into his voice, "I see now that it's my duty, simply. You have a girlish enthusiasm about this rake, Lindley. When the flare of it dies down—oh, I'm contented to wait. I just don't want you to throw yourself away until you've had a chance for a second thought. Do you believe me?"

She put out her hand, found the trunk of a tree, and leaned against it, wearily.

"I suppose you'd best talk to Uncle Whitney," said she. "And then Uncle Whitney can talk to me!"

CHAPTER XXXI

It is necessary to go to Lefty, the gloomiest boy in the entire county, or in all the region round, and see him entering the stall of Mistral with a bucket of water, and slapping the hip of the stallion with an open hand.

He had done it a hundred times before; it had been the neatest trick in his possession, to show to admiring onlookers that, no matter how tigerish this beast might be with others, it was a lamb in his hands. But this fatal time, Mistral slapped back. He slapped back, you might say, without thinking. If he had raised his hoof a little, he would have driven his hoof straight at the body of Lefty; but he flirted it out mule-fashion, straight from the floor, so that it merely scooped the feet from under the boy and dropped him flat, while the bucket hit the farther wall with a crash and a sloshing of water.

That slap on the hip had taken Mistral by surprise. He had been standing in a dream, with a hind foot pointed, and a pendulous lower lip and a glassy eye. Perhaps he had been thinking of how the wind sang past his ears that day before when Bister took him across country. At any rate, he was jerked back to earth by the sting of a hand on his hip, and the kick followed instinctively. Then the crash of the bucket set him on fire, and the fall of the boy.

He knew it was Lefty; but that didn't seem to matter. What he had failed to do with one hoof, he tried with

two. Lefty, getting to his knees with a crackling fire of curses, saw two legs flash across his back. He knew Mistral, therefore he stopped to make no protest but jumped for the door of the stall from all fours, and got through it just as the closing teeth of the stallion nipped the seat of his breeches.

It made Lefty clutch the injured spot with a howl. Then he seized a handy pitchfork and rushed back for vengeance, only to find that Mistral had turned from the door and was quietly munching hay, and stamping and switching his tail because an insistent fly was buzzing along the ridge of his back. Lefty was very brave; but he felt that if he ran this pitchfork into the horse there might be consequences even more terrible than he could anticipate. So he threw the pitchfork aside, and for a few glowing moments he invited the wrath of the Lord to descend upon the earth and strike Mistral, first, and then gather Lindley Bister in consuming fire. After that, the rest of the universe might perish; he, Lefty, would be content.

Often these frightful outbursts of profanity eased the heart of Lefty, but to-day there were things which he could not put into words. There is no wrath so destructive as that of the man who has no one to blame for his troubles except himself. The scientists who declare that something cannot spring out of nothing have never consulted the human heart, or studied white anger, or black wrath. Fury and malice were so intense in Lefty that they became a physical sensation; he narrowed his eyes and quivered from head to foot.

And after that, he went out from the barn for the

simple reason that he felt he would go mad if he stayed inside. He could see that the spell he had cast over the stallion was broken, and though Mistral might have charged him more by mistake than out of cold mischief, still he knew that he never could stand before the big gray armed with his old confidence. The days of his glory were at an end, and though he could not tell exactly how he had been toppled from his high place, yet he knew definitely that Bister was to blame.

So he walked blindly across country. Sometimes he had to stop and he gripped both hands and shuddered as the poison worked in him. And sometimes he flung himself forward, running as hard and as fast as his lank, unmuscled legs would carry him. He stumbled in a ditch, and got mud to his knees; but of course that merely increased the savagery of his soul, and so he stumbled out at last into a narrow bridle path and straight into the arms, as it were, of Jack Lynmouth and the devil.

It was the loveliest spot in that entire countryside, beyond a doubt, for poplars fringed the narrow path, and the sun shone down through level sprays of glory; and the falling leaves were streaks of gold. Yet Lynmouth had not chosen this way because of its beauty but because of its solitude, for he wanted to ride alone with his thoughts. The old phrase from the poet was dinning like a bell in the back of his mind: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the full——" For Lynmouth felt the power of the tide that bore him on, and yet he thought that it was a narrow crest that carried him; so that if he slipped from the exactly proper position, he would drop to the pebbles and mud and be over-

whelmed in the backwash. So it was that he rode the wave of the colonel's favor, knowing all the while that this favor could not persist long. Even his virtues, really, were distasteful to the fiery old horseman, and he knew that what had thrust him into his present position and maintained him there was Colonel Bister's fury at his grandson. Only a touch was needed to throw him down and restore Bister, and the one thing that could establish him strongly and on firm ground would be his marriage with Halcyone. And if in his relations with the colonel he felt that he was being carried by a rapid but treacherous wave, in his affair with the girl he likened himself to one who walked a slack wire high above the ground and tossing in a gale. Three dangers threatened him—from the girl herself, from the colonel's reaction, and from the attitude of the judge.

He had selected his attitude with the greatest care. Before Halcyone he stood as one deeply, gravely attached to her, reluctant to urge her towards the marriage, but forced ahead by his scorn of Bister. Before the colonel and the judge he appeared as one who loved the girl, to be sure, but who loathed the thought of forcing himself upon her; however, he was willing to martyr all his pride in his devotion to the large scheme which the colonel and the judge had conceived.

This was a rôle so delicately conceived and so precariously maintained that the least puff of wind from the wrong direction would dash him to the earth; the single word "hypocrite" would destroy him, if it came for the split part of a second into the mind of the colonel, or of the judge. All could be managed, he felt, if it were

not for the passion, the most untimely and unexpected passion, of Halcyone. For the present, she was reining in her anger, suspicion, and grief out of regard to her uncle; but at any moment she was apt to break out in a wild protest which would scatter his hopes like a broken cobweb and throw him back upon his precarious hope of Bister Hall, alone. However, like a good gambler he never dreamed of faltering at the game, but continued to play his cards, smiling or grave at the proper moments. Now, to escape from the necessity of acting for a while, he had hunted out this bit of solitude and so came down that golden way and blundered upon Lefty.

He would have ridden straight past the boy if it had not been for the glance of black malice which Lefty cast at him. So he drew rein and called: "Hello, Lefty! How is Mistral, and the rest at Divine's place?"

Lefty went on a step or two as though his first impulse was to overlook the address; but then, as though the temptation to pour out a little of his bitterness was too great for him, he turned and snarled at the big man: "What're they to you?"

He was like a snake, hungry to strike at something—even at a rock or a stick! And the evil in that young face amused and intrigued Lynmouth; it carried him away from his own worries and placed him in another world which must have narrower horizons than his own, but which seemed to lie under just as dark a shadow.

"Why, my lad," said Lynmouth, "Lindley Bister is my cousin, you know. And I'm always keen to know how he's getting on with that man-eating gray. I'm afraid

he'll have a bad accident with the brute, one of these days!"

"You're afraid!" sneered Lefty. "You're afraid! Aw, God, now who'd swallow that? You wouldn't be glad if Mistral was to smash him to bits and tear him to pieces, would you? It wouldn't please you none, would it? Hell, no; it'd make you pretty sick, eh?"

Mr. Lynmouth frowned, and then shrugged his shoulder. As a matter of fact, the utter deviltry in this youth was charming as a relief. He became sensible of his own virtues.

"You have a black opinion of me, Lefty," said he.

Lefty made a pause; his thoughtful eyes showed that he was reaching for some weapon with which he could hurt this man the most. And he grinned when he found it.

"You and Mr. Lindley are pretty near as close as brothers, maybe?" he asked.

"There's a blood tie," said Lynmouth vaguely. "What sort of nonsense is going around the countryside?"

"You didn't sneak up and beat him out of his home, maybe?" said Lefty, retreating a little towards the fence.

"You're a malicious vagabond," said Lynmouth without heat.

"Well," suggested Lefty, "you better go over to Divine's and Mistral. He's eating out of the hand of Mr. Lindley, now."

"Ah?" cried Lynmouth.

"He is!"

"That's a broad lie!" declared Lynmouth. "It can't be. Of course, the horse is an incurable man-killer. The worst sort of a bad one!"

"Is he?" mocked the boy. "Go see him, then! Why, Mr. Lindley has got him in the hollow of his hand. Jumps him like a rocking horse! And he's bet every penny he's got on him, they say! What's more, he'll win the Point-to-point. You hear? He'll win it!"

Lynmouth, staring and wanting to disbelieve with all his heart, was forced back to the conclusion that the boy was telling the truth, after all, the most unpalatable sort of truth. He could not tell just why the victory of the man over the horse should have such a great significance, but vaguely, instinctively, he felt that, by conquering Mistral, his cousin had regained almost all the ground which he had lost up to that point. For one thing, he would be a hero, now. And the heart of the colonel would warm towards him. While if the gray horse won the Point-to-point, or even finished among the first, the pride and joy of the colonel would be so outrageous that nothing could prevent a reconciliation. These after-effects and possibilities loomed greater and greater in his mind's eye.

"He's got Mistral, after all!" murmured Lynmouth.

"Aw, you love him like a brother. I can see that," said Lefty. "Why, any blind baby could see through you, Mr. Lynmouth!"

"He's done a harder job than beat Mistral," suggested Lynmouth. "He seems to have taken you into camp, Lefty."

"Me? I hate his guts!" cried the boy, with a sudden outpouring of fury.

"That's strong! That's strong!" declared Lynmouth, his glance sharpening. "What's he done to you?"

"He's a sneak, and a low hound!" raged Lefty.

"So, so, so!" smiled Lynmouth. "And what can you do about it, my lad?"

"D'you think that I'm a helpless kid?" cried Lefty. "Oh, you think that, do you? Well, one of these days, some of you'll wake up and learn different about me!"

He changed his tone suddenly and sneered at Lynmouth: "It wouldn't please you none if I was to knife him—the cur! It wouldn't tickle your gizzard, would it?"

Lynmouth stared, and said nothing.

"Thinking it over, I see," went on Lefty. "Why, in another minute you'll be *hirin'* me to do it! How much 'd you pay for a firstclass murder, Mr. Lynmouth?"

Mr. Lynmouth did not smile, and neither did he answer, but his solemn, steady gaze sank in upon the mind of the boy until Lefty ceased smiling in turn and stared back. With equal gravity they faced one another, thinking the same thought.

Then Lefty moistened his white lips.

"By God," said he, "I didn't think that you had that much stuff in you! Would you play that high, Mr. Lynmouth? Tell me!"

"I don't know what you mean, my boy," said Lynmouth, but he could not help glancing apprehensively over his shoulder, and Lefty laughed long and loudly.

"Ah, God, ain't you a slick and smooth one!" said Lefty. "You're a sweetie, you are! Mr. Gentleman Lynmouth of Bister Hall—aw, hell! What are you gunna do? What are you gunna do? Are you gunna talk money to me?"

There was not a soul near, and the solitude let young

Jack Lynmouth's darker spirit off the leash. It ranged boldly ahead of him, and he let it go. For how subtly, beautifully, completely this would solve all his troubles —make him the last resource of the colonel, drop Halcyone into a helpless despair—and establish him upon a foundation of granite.

"I don't know what you mean," he repeated, his cold eye holding that of the boy. "But if there should be an unfortunate accident—do you understand me, Lefty?"

"Say, chief," said the boy, "there ain't anybody that ever could understand you better. I've heard the same line before! I've heard it all before!"

Lynmouth looked him over again. And when one considered this youngster more closely, he was not the gangling, hollow-chested stripling that he at first appeared. There was a little touch of something—of fire in the heart, of nerve in the soul. It gave Lefty a significance—the significance, say, of a supple-bladed stiletto.

"I don't know what you're worth Lefty," he said with a sudden frankness.

"That's more like it," nodded Lefty. "Why, you'n me may be able to do business together. Well, chief, I know what this job will be worth to you. I don't want much for my share. Fifty thousand will fit my hand, about."

Mr. Lynmouth smiled.

"You're a talented lad, Lefty," said he, "but you don't want to try to pick all the stars out the sky—not all at one sweep."

"Sounds high, does it?" said Lefty. "Now lemme tell you, old timer. This job looks easy. But it ain't. There

ain't any satisfaction in knifing him in the back. Not much, I mean. And there ain't much in shooting him. A gun makes noise. Mistral has got to kill him. Mistral has got to take his head off!"

The nerves of Jack Lynmouth were like strung steel, so steady and so strong were they, but now even he was forced to glance down to the ground for a moment, before he replied:

"And how is that, Lefty?"

"He stole that horse from me—turned him against me. Oh, damn the dirty, sneaking——"

"We're wasting time," broke in Lynmouth.

"Are we? Well, lemme give you the lay of the land. This Lindley Bister—well, you know him. He ain't sleepy. He ain't a bit! And he's got a lot of hams and yeggs around him that'd tear a man to pieces if you so much as looked cross-eyed at Bister. Divine is a tough mug. And Loomis is a hard one, too. And there's Tim McFarland—why, hell, he's a gunman, that yegg is! I'm saying nothin' about that ferret-faced Chance. But he'd follow me around the world if he thought I'd bumped off his boss. And Muldoon and Gregory—and there's others, maybe. They're all ready to fight for Bister. Now, bo, you want me to step up and sap this bird. All right. It ain't impossible. But it'll mean money. You can't get class for pennies!"

Mr. Lynmouth had been thinking. And now he offered the product of his thought, for he took out a pocket knife, and with it pried at the setting of a ring on his finger.

"Hold out your hand, Lefty."

Lefty obeyed, and received in his narrow palm a glittering diamond.

"That's worth something more than twelve hundred dollars. I know its price," said Lynmouth. "That's your first payment."

"It's a skinny installment, I'd say," remarked the boy. "A skinny installment on fifty thou'."

But he turned the stone lovingly, and then looked back at the man with hungry eyes.

"Don't talk like a little fool!" said Mr. Lynmouth. "If this trick is turned for me, I won't be ungrateful. I'll remember you. I don't know for how much, but you'll never be able to call me a miser!"

"And I'm to let go on that?" demanded Lefty in the rising tones of injured worth. "Say, am I a sucker, chief?"

"You've got a time limit," went on Lynmouth, overlooking the protest. "It has to be before the Point-to-point, you understand? In the meantime, I've simply barked my hand against a tree and I've lost my diamond. Good-bye, Lefty!"

"Hey, wait a minute, will you?" cried Lefty.

But the other was already gone, galloping swiftly down the lane.

"I'll see you damned, first!" screamed Lefty after him. "Come back and take your damned diamond——"

The wind whistled in his ears for a response, and Lefty grew quiet again, and stared down at the jewel. It was quite the finest thing that ever had come into his life. The dignity which a great concession confers fell upon Lefty and made him stand straighter. And, no matter what

the future might hold, he began to feel that, now the idea was lodged in his mind, he would do the thing anyway—do it for nothing. Everything on the side was the purest sort of velvet.

So he turned back towards Divine's house, and he whistled cheerfully as he walked across the fields. The beauty of that bright autumn day for the first time entered his eye.

CHAPTER XXXII

It was not long after this, with the great day of the Point-to-point drawing perilously close, that the judge said to Halcyone that he had noticed an increasing languor in her for some time past; and so he proposed a walk across the hills—a blind ramble, with the judge to carry the lunch basket, and let them carry on until hunger made them stop to eat. For of course that is the only proper way for a picnic.

They started in the misty brightness of the morning, and they got into the back country at once, and held on over paths and byways which the judge himself hardly knew; so that he kept exclaiming with pleasure as he made new discoveries.

"The automobile is the curse of man," pronounced the judge. "Takes you out of the house and gives you a gale of wind in the face and a bad smell in your nostrils. And that's the impression you have of the face of Mother Nature. A swirl of color here—a house there—a village leaps away there, and if you want to look twice at the same thing, you have to break your neck to try. Even horses won't take the place of Shank's pony. I tell you, my dear, when I was a boy I ranged over every bit of ground in this county. There wasn't an apple orchard where I hadn't stolen apples and been chased like a fox from most of them. Speak of the devil and there—hush! Hush!"

For down the hollow just before them a fox was trotting with a heavy chicken in its mouth. It saw them in another moment, and dashed from view into a coppice, but without abandoning its prey.

"A chicken out of Tom Merchant's yard, I'll swear," surmised the judge. "What a lucky, happy life a fox leads, Hal. Did you ever stop to think of that? No burning up of brains in following stock reports, at least. No worry about marrying off his wards, either," he added, taking the arms of Halcyone as he broke into a laugh. "Because I do worry about that, my dear."

Halcyone was silent. She was often silent in these days and, as the judge had noticed, growing a little paler from time to time. However, he had been a professional talker so much of his life that there was rarely a time, in his company, when the conversation flagged. He went on, answering his own suggestion:

"The thing which burdens me, my dear, is that you don't seem over gay about this match. I never hear you bubbling over with enthusiasm. And yet young Lynmouth seems to me as proper a man as ever stepped."

"Yes," said Halcyone.

"You say it, but not an ounce of heart in your voice."

All at once he stopped and made her face him. He had turned gray, actually.

"Look here, Hal. Is it possible—I mean, is the scheme an abomination to you? Is Jack distasteful to you? Out with it! Out with it! Why, I'd rather be stood up and shot at by a file of soldiers than countenance such a thing for an instant! Do you hear me?"

"I believe you, too," said Halcyone, and she studied

his face, and felt such affection for him and pity for him swell up in her that she almost forgot her own tragedy.

"No, but say what's in your mind, Hal! As a friend to a friend!"

"Dear Uncle Whitney," said the girl. "What shall I say?"

"It rushes over me. It roars in my ears! This thing may be a torture to you!"

"Have I ever said so?" she asked.

"Ah, Hal," said he, "you know that I've had my heart fixed on the scheme for a long time, and you're such a dutiful little beggar that I cannot tell whether you would speak out your mind or simply sacrifice yourself with a smile. And anything rather than that! Zounds! It upsets me!"

She did smile, now, but it was with kindness, and at him. The judge sighed and took her arm and went on with her.

"A fence has been built between us, in some devilish manner," said he. "I feel that it's there—a barrier, you know. But let me tell you that for fifteen years—do you know what I have been doing?"

"Working for me," said Halcyone. "I know that very well!"

"No, no!" cried the judge. "Working, as I thought all the time, to erect a great estate. Filling my hands with large ideas. Being a Napoleon of the Street, in a way. Rejoicing in the power that I was building, you know. But now I find that all the time I really was working simply to make you happy. Working because I loved

you, Hal. So that where's the good of all of my work if in the end my schemes should make you unhappy?"

She made a little pause, after this, hoping that he would speak again, but he said expectantly, "Well, Hal, well?"

They were going up hill, as he panted out these words, and as they reached the crest of it, covered with trees, with the wind behind them, she answered finally: "Shall I really tell you the exact truth?"

"Yes," said the judge, with the resolution of one who faces a disagreeable duty. "Yes, tell me the whole truth!"

But just then they came to the verge of the trees and in view of the sheltered inner face of the hill, and the judge murmured: "Hello! Here's an idyllic scene!"

For just below them sat a pretty girl with the head of a youth pillowed in her lap; and a splendid gray horse, without headstall or rope, grazed happily near the couple. The wind, at that fatal moment, fell away to an absolute whisper, and then was still. So that out of this treachery of nature every word that was spoken by the pair could be heard by the judge and Halcyone.

"He looks a little fat in the ribs, though," said the voice of Lindley Bister.

"I don't think so," said Kitty Divine.

"You don't, Kitty? Well, you have an eye for proper horseflesh, if you're your father's daughter. And not too light in the forehand."

"No. He has to be light there if he's to jump, Dad always says."

"Ah, I'm glad you think that. Jolly old beggar, isn't he? See him pricking his ears at that squirrel!"

"I'm sick of him," said Kitty Divine.

"Ha? Hello! And what's this?"

"Oh, but I am!"

"Kitty, Kitty, you're sick of Mistral?"

"And d'you think," said Kitty Divine, "that I stay home from work for the sake of talkin' about any beast of a horse in the whole world?"

Mr. Bister considered this remark and made no reply.

Then: "Lean over and let me see your eyes, Kitty."

"I won't," said Kitty.

"You will, though, you little beggar. Now lean over. There's a good girl. Devilishly pretty eyes, but cross, just now. What's wrong with you. Is my head heavy?"

She caught his head with a pretended fierceness.

"You devil of a man!" said she.

"Am I a devil?"

"You know that you're makin' a frightful fool of me!"

"Why, Kitty darling, who could make a fool of such a bright girl?"

"Don't talk to me as if I was a baby—or in school, just!"

He took one of her hands and held it before his eyes.

"Who'd think that you had such strength in these pretty little hands, my dear?"

And he kissed the hand lightly.

She snatched it away, crying: "I *won't* let you baby me, Mr. Lindley!"

"What an angry girl!" chuckled Bister. "But you're not so very old, Kate."

"Ah," murmured the girl, drawing in her breath. "I like you to call me that——"

"But Kitty's a lot prettier and sweeter, I'd say."

"It's not so womanly," said Kitty. "I'm a woman, Lindley Bister. Did you ever stop to think of that, now?"

"Tell me, Kate, my dear, how shall I tell when a girl turns into a woman?"

"Aw, that's an easy thing, of course. When the time comes that we're as much care to our dad as to our mother, then you know that a girl has grown up."

"Let me think about that. By Jove, there's a meaning, in that, and you're a wise little rascal, Kitty—Kate, I mean!"

The interested judge was under the impression that Kitty leaned at this moment and kissed Mr. Lindley Bister, but he could never be quite sure, for at that moment he was caught with unexpected strength by his niece and whirled away in a new direction through the trees.

The judge was laughing as he went.

"The infernal, good-for-nothing, fox-hunting, trouble-making, flirting rake," said the judge. "Damn me, but I can't help loving that boy, Hal! He makes me young again!"

"Uncle Whitney!" cried the girl. "You never did such a disgusting thing in your life, I trust and pray!"

"Disgusting? What disgusting thing?"

"Do you want me to describe it?"

"Come, Hal, have you never sat on a hillside while some young fellow told you how wonderful——"

"Never!" cried Halcyone.

"You've missed a good deal, then," said the judge.

"Little Kitty Divine looked rather comfortable, I thought."

"The contemptible little——!"

"Why, Hal, what a fine temper you're in!"

"Tell me—do all men do such things?"

"Most of 'em—when they get a chance. No, not Lynmouth. I'd exempt him from that. You don't need to worry about him. I think he'd look on it as a horrible waste of time, you know!"

The judge began to laugh again.

"Did you notice Mistral, though? I never saw a horse more fit! Never! Huge beast, eh? He blotted out half the sky, and when he comes to the start for the race, I'll wager a little last-minute money will come in on him! The colonel has entered Hastings, did you know that? At the last minute—had to have something from the county to back with his money!"

Halcyone seemed to be paying little or no attention to this chatter, but she walked along with a fine swing to her step, and a sparkle of anger in her eyes.

"Uncle Whitney!" she said suddenly.

"Well, dear?"

"Of course, every girl has to marry sooner or later."

"Of course."

"Then why shouldn't I marry Jack as well as any other man?"

"Exactly my thought all along! Shall I tell him that?"

"You might as well," said Halcyone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

In the camp of Lindley Bister there was a great deal of anxiety and trouble among his followers, for, as Chance expressed it tersely and bitterly, they were providing too much salt for the meat that was on hand. A valet, a cook, a butler, a groom, and one who served as a sort of general chauffeur and extra man were, after all, a shade more than a young bachelor of very limited means could afford. There was Lefty, also; but the others preferred to leave him out of the account. Clancy Muldoon, being summoned to their councils, straightway suggested that they change the name of the tavern to Bister House, and give Mr. Lindley a half interest for the sake of the use of his name, while Darley superintended the kitchen, and Gregory looked after the service, and Chance acted as general houseman and manager. Tim McFarland could be outside man, and there would have to be a stable to take charge of horses for the guests. As Mr. Muldoon expressed it, before long the old shop would be crowded with swells paying fancy prices and hot to get in for a little hunting on week-ends.

Mr. Muldoon had remained awake an entire night, revolving this gigantic plan in his mind, only to have Gregory dismiss the thing with a wave of the hand. The Bister name never could be applied to such low concerns. But, on the other hand, there was no good reason why the rest of them should not furnish up the tavern and

operate it along the lines which Muldoon suggested. In fact, there was a need for just such a "private" hotel in this hunting district.

However, even the second plan was crushed by Lindley Bister in person. He called his staff together and made them a speech.

He sat on the edge of the dining table after his dinner and puffed cigarette smoke at the ceiling while he told them that the jolly old real estate business was really the easiest thing in the world. He had sold two houses in the city; and now he had a fine chance to dispose of an apartment house. His commissions were going to be big, big, big! It was all ridiculously simple. You took a house for sale and talked to a friend who was moving to town, and just sold the thing to him. And if a friend from town was hunting for a country estate, why, you simply ushered him into the right place. There was nothing to it, after all. It was fun! *And* money. In the meantime, did they think that they could serve the rest of the world and also work for him? When he had finished cleaning up on the Point-to-point, he told them, he would rent a place of his own, and set up as a gentleman should! In the meantime, they were not to worry about his finances; they were just to help him win the Borrogate Cup, and the purse along with it!

It was an absurd gesture, after all; but it kept a tragedy from the door of Bister. The very next morning Tim McFarland, vaguely anxious to be of help, ran his hand under the basket of Mistral, whom Loomis had properly saddled the moment before, and touched something that very slightly bit the tip of his finger.

Wondering what manner of insect it could be, he made a more careful examination, and presently he discovered that a great hard burr with mighty bristles, keen as steel points, was imbedded in the blanket, and concealed so cleverly that it was practically invisible to the naked eye.

Tim McFarland asked no questions; he simply reached for Lefty, and in return nearly received the point of a knife in his ribs. It should really have been the last of McFarland, but while one hand gripped Lefty at the back of the neck, he saw the flash of the naked knife blade and snapped his other fist against Lefty's jaw. That youth turned limp and sick, so Tim trussed him under one arm and carried him to the watering trough. One ducking brought life back to Lefty, and seating him dripping on the edge of the trough, McFarland spoke as follows:

"How the burr come in the saddle blanket, kid," said he, "I got no way of provin'. But you know, and I know. If Mr. Lindley had dropped his weight into that saddle, Mistral would of dropped him straight up again in the pit of the sky and caught him in his teeth comin' down. I know that, and you know it. I ain't gunna wring your neck. I ain't gunna tell Mr. Lindley, because I don't think he knows how to fire anybody, and he wouldn't believe that any man or boy could be a hundred per cent. snake, like you. But I'll tell you this, Lefty, if I catch you around Divine's place again, or if I come so much as on the traces of you, I'll cut out your liver and feed it to Mike's game cocks. They need something to freshen 'em up a bit, anyway!"

Having completed this oration, Tim McFarland went

back to the stables and told Tod Loomis what he had seen. Mr. Loomis rushed out to find Lefty and add a few ideas of his own. He only paused to snatch up a horsewhip before starting. But when he got outside the barn, Lefty was not in view. Neither did he return that day, or the next. And Bister, with the hour for the race rushing closer and closer, was too busy and excited to notice the boy's absence.

The whole county was flooded with people. Every house was charged with guests; and special trains were going to whirl down fresh multitudes. Bister himself had looked over all the candidates in his spare moments. The real estate work was abandoned altogether, now. It was nothing but horse, morning, noon, and night. And what Bister himself did not see was seen for him by the trained eyes of Clancy Muldoon, by Tim McFarland, by Mike Divine, Tod Loomis, or even by Chance, who knew all things, it appeared, in time of need. So every training report flowed in upon the ear of Bister. He learned that Croix d'Or had trained away a little fine and probably could not stand more than three miles of that terrible going. Dr. Crook was lame, but would run. The great Suetonius was off his feed; and Musketeer had been refusing like the untractable brute that he was. Even the glorious Lapwing had not a clean slate. It was whispered that he was not quite sound—that Ned Sherdon, seventh of that name, lay awake nights wondering if the expensive legs of his thoroughbred would hold up during the crucial test.

But Bister never allowed his heart to be raised or lowered by what he heard. He kept his eye fixed upon

Mistral, following to the letter the directions which Tod Loomis gave him. Tod was lean of face and dull of eye. Night and day he was pondering the problems of the training—more gallop, or more jogging? More jumping, or more sprinting? Something over brush, or more over rails? And Mistral was responding. He was a glutton for work. He came in at night with as much fire as he carried out in the morning; and he refused to go fine. There was a certain amount of bottom which he would not lose—Loomis thanked God for it. And yet it might mean that his speed would not have the proper edge.

They had their final conversation the evening before the race, Loomis and Mike Divine and Tim McFarland all sitting around the table with portions of Muldoon's apple nectar in front of them. The result of their conference was the decision that big Mistral must stay in front or near the front all the way. Judging him, studying him, dreaming of him, Bister felt that he could rate the horse correctly for the entire five miles. And, once behind, what chance would he have against the terrific speed of such runners as Suetonius, Musketeer, or Lapwing? He must run for the head all the time and be forced if he lagged!

Then Bister went to bed, turned over, and slept without a dream till the morning.

Good news—the best of good news! Mistral had rested well. He had cleaned out his feed box. He was as keen as steel.

"No excuses now," said Tod Loomis.

And all at once the time had come to start for the course. So they went in a group, Bister walking and

leading the gray, and Mistral crowding up against his back, and pulling his hat off his head, and in all ways acting far more like a colt than a responsible five year old.

They had to follow bypaths. The roads and even the lanes were clotted with automobiles, and the countryside was never free from the harsh rattle and screech of the klaxons. But so they came to the start and found the whole world had gathered there. By hundreds and by thousands they had come. Multitudes were mounted, to follow the race and view it from the commanding points; the rest were equally divided between the automobilists who would drive where they could to follow the events on the course, and the pedestrians who were streaming here and there across the country, to get the choice positions—hills which would give a long sweep for the eye of the spectator.

And Bister saw one face, first of all—the old Colonel riding Barbarian.

He went straight up to the old man and was met by a cold, steady eye.

"I've entered Mistral in your colors, sir," said Bister. "Until this minute, it hadn't entered my mind that you might object. But I think it's not too late to change."

The colonel turned his head towards the gray.

"A clean ride and a game horse is all I ask, sir," said the colonel, and deliberately turned his mount into the press.

It brought a lump into the throat of Bister. Perhaps the long training had strung his nerves a little fine. And old Mike Divine, whose eyes missed nothing, pressed beside Bister and muttered:

"Did you notice the face of the colonel when he saw Mistral, Mr. Lindley? Stunned, he was. There's others that'll be stunned, too. By the looks of him, partly. But when he starts performin' you'll hear some groans. It's a happy day for most of these bookies, sir—if the luck holds with us! If the luck only holds with us!"

Ned Sherdon walked up to them, his riding boots flashing beneath the edge of his overcoat.

He shook hands with Bister.

"Next to Lapwing," said he. "I wish you luck, old fellow. You have a horse out of a book, Lindley. And by gad, after the miracles you've done with him, he deserves to finish in the money!"

He went on. A pale youth limped up with hand outstretched.

"By the Lord, Lin, you've forgotten me!"

"You're here, Dick? You should be in bed!"

"I've come to see Mistral win," said Dick Bunce. "I've mortgaged my soul to bet on him!"

"The devil you have!"

"Haven't I, though? See where I've hammered the odds!"

And he showed a slip of paper, saying: "Mistral was nowhere, this morning. I got sixty to one to begin with. But now look!"

Lapwing was the favorite. He paid three dollars for one; and Musketeer, of course, was second, paying four. But the third was the name of Mistral, paying seven to one, to be sure, but a considerable distance ahead of Suetonius, who was rated at twelve to one.

"Think of it, man!" said Bunce. "I've made him

third favorite. And yet, by gad, I don't think a soul has put a penny on him except you and me!"

Third favorite—and the bugle was blowing the call to the post!

CHAPTER XXXIV

Colonel Bister used to say that whether his horse was winning or losing, he wanted to be sure where the beast was running. His colors, therefore, were the most staring combination he could find—orange, black, and yellow. And as Bister went towards the post, with Tim and Loomis at the head of Mistral, he heard voices around him: "Who's that splendid outfit?—That's the bad actor, Mistral. You'll see him at the post! And that's Bister —He's bet every penny—disinherited—young fool!—"

Their words were, of course, half lost in the murmur of the crowd and the shouting of voices near and far:

"Did you see my programme? It's all marked! What'll I do!!—Way, there! Way, damn it!—Mr. Chalmers! Mr. Chalmers. Stewards want Mr. Chalmers!—My God, ain't he a beauty!—Ten to four—I'll take that for a hundred—Where's Croix d'Or?—Steady, you old fool——"

"How do you feel, sir?" asked Loomis.

"Sick, Tod. Empty and sick as the devil!"

"Will you have a swallow of brandy?"

"Not a drop, Tod. I want no Dutch courage."

"Good for you, sir. They're all feeling the same way, you know. Every one."

No, not Ned Sherdon, as he went flashing past in his white and purple, smiling and calm!

"Now, sir," said Loomis, "there's one grand thing to

remember in a steeplechase. A forced horse is a beaten horse, five times out of six, but the fellow who goes along, fencing steadily and surely, always has a chance——"

"I know it, Tod. But I couldn't ride that way. No, by God, not for a hundred millions!"

"Well, sir, ride it your own way. I've only got one last thing to say: No matter what happens, Mistral won't shame us! He's made, and he's made well. He's got the foot and he can jump. Some of them that are holding him short will damn themselves before this race is over, sir!"

Now, just before they lined up, a handsome, big man, riding a strong brown horse burst through the crowd and reached them.

It was Lynmouth, holding out his hand with a smile.

"The best of luck to you, Lindley!" said he.

Bister looked at the hand and then at Lynmouth.

"Thank you," said he,-and let Mistral fiddle away to a distance.

The smile did not falter on the face of Lynmouth, however, no matter what was passing inside his mind. But he reined back into the crowd and drifted close to a slender, round-shouldered youth who had a place on the fence.

"Lefty!" said Lynmouth," you owe me a diamond."

Lefty half turned, and over his shoulder he cast a glance so bright with malice and rage that the big man winced.

"You fool!" whispered Lefty. "I've got him fixed, I tell you. Keep away from me!"

Lynmouth went on; and Lefty heard the great bookie,

O'Dowd, near whom he had purposely placed himself, saying: "Beauty, that Mistral. And not four bets down on him with me!"

"Big ones, though!"

"Well, young Bunce wanted to ruin himself. Bister was ruined already. He sent in a final touch of a hundred this morning with a hurry note—'for Lefty.' Who is Lefty, I wonder?"

"What did you give him?"

"Fifty to one. Why not?"

"Well, miracles happen."

"Not against this field, old fellow!"

Lefty, in his place at the fence, listened as one whose soul has turned to ice. Then he wheeled and began slipping like a snake through the crowd, beating at the broad backs before and above him, cursing, whining, snarling: "I got to get through—Mr. Lindley Bister—stop the race—Christ!—d'ye hear?—will you lemme through! Stop the starter——"

And, fighting savagely, he was almost at the spot when he heard a deep, hoarse roar; and then the quiver of the ground as many heavy hoofs smote it.

They were off! And Lefty clung blind and dizzy to the fence, and watched a field of shadows sweep past, and one flashing form of silver, ridden by orange, yellow, and black. Lefty dropped his head on his folded arms and would look no more!

But we must go back with Lindley Bister to the start, while he sat on Mistral, feeling suddenly warm and well, and lifting his hand to Ned Sherdon—who looked very

slender and jockey-like—and greeting the professionals who rode most of the other horses. Philip Osborne, for instance, was much too heavy to back his own Musketeer. And whether he won or lost, Bister knew that he would never regret having ridden in such company as this. A field of eleven were facing the barrier, but such a field as could hardly have been improved upon.

He was close to the outside fence, and he heard the hoarse, eager voice of Mike Divine, calling to him in guarded tones: "Listen, Mr. Lindley—listen, sir, for God's sake! Lapwing is gunna cut the creeks and cut around below The Fork. Sir, do the same thing. Lapwing can gallop. So can Mistral! Mr. Lindley, don't take the short cut!"

That bit of advice fitted into the mind of Bister with a comfortable exactness, as he stared at the country before him, and then called into his mind the lay of the land which was out of sight.

The air line from Pendleton to Tyndal Green was five miles, and the Pendleton-Borrogate-Tyndal Road clung almost to that line. But the road was ruled out, as a matter of course, and the problem thereafter became very complicated. Southeast of Borrogate, the Borrogate Hills were in plain view, rough-topped and sharp-sided. It was enough to walk a horse across them, far less gallop a racer! So that side was ruled out. To the northwest of the town stretched a continuation of the same range, though it was here called the Appleton Hills. They were lower, but still fairly impassable, the only low ground and apparent gap being the break through which Sidney

Bister had tried to ride on that fatal day—low ground close to Borrogate itself, but trapped in the most deadly fashion, as the general had proved to the world.

It was impossible, therefore, to make the run on anything like a straight line from Pendleton to Tyndal Green, and it had been generally accepted that the riders would head straight for the northwestern shoulder of the Appleton Hills, and thence turn nearly at right angles and break for Tyndal Green and the finish. But traveling in this fashion from Pendleton to the hills, the field would have to cross in succession four small strips of water, Marble Creek, Chevenney Run, Charlton Water, and finally Westover Creek. Moreover, the straight line of this course lay through the Chevenney Wood, an open forest, to be sure, but sufficiently crowded with obstacles to slow up the pace a good deal. This was the plan in the mind of Bister, however, until the voice of Mike Divine carried the last second's "tip" to him. And he could see the value of the idea at once.

Not very far east of the straight line between Pendleton and the outer edge of the Appleton hills, all four creeks poured together and swelled Chevenney Run to a fairly considerable stream. The juncture was known as The Fork, and just below the joining the water spread out over a wide, flat, sand-bottomed bed which could easily be forded.

Crossing at this point and then bearing to the left, almost due north, there would be a fine run across open country until, at the verge of the hills, they joined the rest of the field. In this fashion, Ned Sherdon on Lapwing intended to ride a course which would be like a very open

"Z". He would cover a good deal more ground than the rest, but he would have better footing for his horse throughout, and there would be far less strain of jumping, or of forcing through woods, always an exhausting process.

So Bister made up his mind. A moment later the barrier whipped away, and they were off to a perfect start, sweeping down a gentle slope.

Beneath it stood a tall hedge.

"Let him brush through it," Loomis had said. "It's nothing. Just a bit of a ditch beyond!"

He took Mistral well in hand and went down the slope absolutely last of the field. For he wanted to study them, and in the first glance he made up his mind that there would be no surprises on this day. For a child of three could have picked Lapwing and Musketeer from the crowd. All the training tales of overwork, and breaking down were the most apparent nonsense. That pair of fine thoroughbreds ran like two great machines. And Lapwing, first of the field, flicked up and over the hedge more like the bird he was named after than a jumping horse. Then Musketeer. Then the rest.

No, not all smoothly. A wild cry stabbed at the ear of Bister, and he saw Barbarian go down.

He almost smiled. It had been such folly on the part of the Colonel to enter that horse in such company as this. If only the jockey were not hurt——

Then he left Mistral take the hedge, and felt the great horse swing to it lightly and strongly. Ay, and as he rose, something seemed to snap in the entrails of the stallion, and Bister flew from the back of the gray taking

his saddle with him. The girth had burst cleanly in two!

He shot down, landed headforemost, and turned a somersault like a tumbler on a vaudeville stage, coming staight to his feet and staggering back until his shoulders struck against the ribs of Mistral. Mistral, who waited for his master—Mistral the bad actor!

People were running towards them, streaking across the fields, shouting, but the stunned brain of Bister refused to work until the great gray horse tossed his head and threw a ringing whinny after the departing riders. That brought the wits of young Bister back. He wiped away the blood that had burst from nose and mouth; he took a step, and pitched on his face. Something was wrong with his left leg. It was numb.

Horseman rushed about him, and the wild voice of Tim McFarland was crying at his ear: "You ain't killed, Mr. Lindley?"

He sat up.

"Get the saddle off Barbarian," he commanded. "Damn you, Tim, hurry!"

"You ain't hurt?"

"I'm right as can be. Quick, quick!"

Tim McFarland, and others around him, were tearing the saddle away from the back of Barbarian. It was flung on Mistral and the cinch drawn secure.

And someone, raising the saddle of Mistral, was saying sternly: "The cleanest break I ever saw. My friends, this girth has been cut almost in two!"

Bister heard them, but the words had no meaning.

Tod Loomis was lifting him to his feet, saying: "Why

d'you want a saddle on Mistral? You ain't gone mad, sir? You're not going to try to finish this race?"

"For the love of God, Tod," he groaned, "get me into the saddle! I've got an idea! I've got an idea, I tell you—if you'll once get me there!"

Tod, and his own clumsy pawing efforts, finally got him into the saddle, and he turned the head of Mistral after the field just as Colonel Bister plunged towards him, shouting: "Lindley! Lindley! You mad young fool, get out of that saddle! McFarland, stop him! Loomis!"

Stop Mistral now? As well try to stop a flash of silver lightning! For off he bounded, and the wrench of the starting made Bister reel in the saddle, not from lack of grip, but from the blinding pain in his left leg. It sent up agony like a pillar of fire, searing his brain.

But far, far off, half lost to his dull eyes, he saw a spot of white and purple, and a spot of gold and violet speeding towards The Fork. Both Lapwing and Musketeer had taken the long way round, trusting to the devouring strength and length of their striding, while the rest of the field preferred to jump and take chances through the woods.

And Bister laughed savagely to himself; and a great flood of joy swept over him and banished even the pain for a moment. They had their tricky device—Sherdon and the other. But he would show them a trick worth ten of theirs. It had come to him like a voice from the blue as he sat dazed and sick on the ground. And now, by the grace of God, though he had lost a terribly vital minute

or more, he would make it all up, and run the leaders to death at the finish!

He became calmly aware of all the possibilities that lay in him and in Mistral; and he began to rate the big stallion to his work, steadily and surely, as though he were carrying a speedometer in his brain.

The broad face of the Chevenney flashed before him, and Mistral jogged through it.

Meanwhile, curious spectators were following him in their automobiles, for now he was close to the main Borrogate Road, and as Mistral climbed up the farther bank of the stream, he could hear them shouting—shouting advice, perhaps—and then the red face of Mike Divine, as he stood up in his Ford and bellowed:

"Mr. Lindley, turn back! Don't be killin' yourself, lad, just for the sake of seein' a race finished!"

Pretty Kitty Divine, too, was clasping her hands and imploring.

He remembered, afterwards, smiling at the thought that Kitty must have learned that tragic gesture in the movies. But now Mistral was up the bank, and Bister could see the entire field that remained to the race.

Of the seven who entered the Chevenney Wood, four had survived the water jumps and the struggle through the cover. The scarlet, primrose and blue of Major O. T. Cheney on Suetonius led that section of the field; behind came salmon pink and blue—that was staunch old Dr. Crook; and Croix d'Or and another—he could not identify that last horse.

However, all the four were leading Lapwing and Musketeer as they came up from The Fork. But all the truth

of the race was not yet known, for the jumps which had checked off three of the runners must have taken something from the others. Yes, even in the first glance, Bister could see that Lapwing and strong Musketeer were gaining smoothly and easily upon the others. Only Suetonius seemed hardly less strong in his gallop.

Far to the left the entire field was flying towards the outer shoulder of the Appleton Hills, but Bister did not swerve to the side. Instead, he aimed his course straight ahead towards an apparent gap in the range near Borrogate where a little round-headed eminence was topped off with the blunt tower which, as all men knew, was Syndam's Mill.

And now it came home to all those spectators who stood on the hills, or who rode across the open, or who streamed down the road in their automobiles, that history was about to repeat itself, and that another Bister was about to throw himself away in a mad attempt.

Women screamed and men cursed deeply in the hollow of their throats, but was there one of them who really regretted the thing which was to be done?

Tod Loomis, certainly, flying up the road in the roadster, and Tim McFarland screeching beside him—that pair would have stopped him if they could, but the rest watched and waited and exclaimed, and then made desperate efforts to get in such a position that they could see the foolhardy attempt. For if thousands will pay to see a bullfight, why should not thousands rush to see man and horse die in a wildly gallant attempt?

CHAPTER XXXV

But just as the torment in his left leg had disappeared, so the noise of the crowd meant nothing to Bister now. He had three things to consider, and they filled his mind and soul so full that there was simply no room for anything else. He had to watch the field, he had to take stock of the course he was riding, and above all he had to concentrate on Mistral. For the big fellow was going like an engine which accelerates itself automatically; he required constant handling. Above all he must be kept from boring to the left, for he wanted to be with the others as they flew northwest towards the end of the hills.

Borrogate grew larger ahead and to the right, until he could pick out the houses one by one, and then Muldoon's tavern where George Washington had tasted a glass of the famous cider. He smiled at that, swinging Mistral over a yawning ditch. There was not a flaw in the action of the gray. He was devouring the miles as cheerfully as though this were merely a pleasure gallop.

The field was out of sight behind the hills, and a sudden panic came on Bister, for in his mind he could see them flying towards the goal; and Mistral seemed to be standing still—a veritable rockinghorse. He fought that panic out of his mind, and settled himself, for it would take shrewd riding to get Mistral up Snydam's Hill without stealing his wind.

They cantered the first slope; they jogged the sharper rise; and up the final pitch they walked, as General Bister had walked Sarpedon on that other day of days. Twenty people were gathered there, half their attention given to the distant spectacle on Borrogate Meadows, where the rest were running, and half to Bister as the gray came laboring up. And Bister, as he passed the mill, saw that from where he stood to the finish was certainly no farther than the rest had to run. Bobbing softly up and down, six horses were strung out there, three well in the lead of the rest, and first of all—he strained his eyes—he saw the flash of the white silks of Ned Sherdon.

Mistral, seeing the fatal slope before him, was walking with a nervous step, high-headed, snorting.

Then a man in the dress of an officer of the motor-cycle police rushed out at Bister, crying: "Don't do it, sir! You've done enough, Mr. Lindley——"

Bister looked again. And it seemed to him that even in this interval the white silks had opened up a little gap on the second horse—he called loudly to Mistral, and they shot over the hedge beside the mill. He could hardly have turned back, now, if he had wanted to. The slope and the plunging impetus of Mistral took command and down they raced. He threw himself well back, with a steadying pull, and they cleared the fence which jumped up before them—and two strides away Bister saw a yawning chasm, where Snydam Creek had chiseled its chasm out of the hard rock.

He saw it and knew that he dared not pause to think; an old hunting cry came trembling and ringing on his

lips, and the slash of his whip flung Mistral at the gap. He did not look down, and yet as they reached the height of their leap and seemed to hang suspended, he knew the white water which was foaming so far beneath him.

The wind snatched his cap from his head as though with a threatening hand. And then they struck the farther bank. The hindquarters of Mistral dipped sickeningly down; there was a shudder of effort, and now the good gray recovered and stumbled into a trot which a whipstroke brought to a gallop, and so they jumped the last barrier and below them the Slide dipped away like the face of a precipice.

Ears pricking and nostrils flaring, Mistral sat down like a dog and slid the thing with widely braced forelegs; and Bister, angling back as far as he could, might have reached behind him and touched the pebbles that bubbled up in their wake. The wind shrieked around his ears; and suddenly there was a shock that almost flung him from the saddle.

Mistral had reached the level; and steadying himself while pebbles and rocks danced around him, he stretched away across the Borrogate Meadows with a long, killing stride.

The thing was done. Vaguely, Bister knew hands were waving and voices screaming at him from the hill behind, from the road ahead, from the tops of Borrogate houses, from the spectators who dotted the meadows with their horses. But all of these things did not matter. The danger itself was nothing. All that counted was that he was riding on even terms with the field which flew far off on his left.

Every stride drew them closer together; and he could see that as far as they were concerned, it was a three-horse thing. Suetonius was in second postion; Musketeer with his long neck stretched straight out looked nearly spent, but that was always how he seemed in the heat of a race; and Lapwing floated lightly, daintily in the lead, barely flicking the turf with his gallop.

He could see their heads turn towards him; he could see Ned Sherdon freshen the pace with a jerk; and Bister laughed with a savage satisfaction. Let that shock of his sudden reappearance tell against them. Above all let them see Mistral running easily within his strength. And so he hit Tyndal Wood.

It seemed as though the shadow of the trees that swept over him gave his weakness and his pain a chance to strike into his brain. He turned half-sick, and as he relaxed he felt Mistral flounder like a beaten horse as he jumped a low, broken fence.

But yonder on the left, through the scattering trees, he could see the field sweeping with the sun on their silks—a flash of them now and again, and always the white and purple of Sherdon in the lead.

It poured a fierce strength in Bister, and he gathered Mistral like a sword in his hand, and saw the ears prick confidently, gallantly, once again. No one who watched him could have dreamed that he was anything other than a fresh horse, but Bister had proved the truth. For all the swing and rhythmic grace of his stride, Mistral was tired, terribly tired. How much the labor up Syndam Hill had cost, who could guess? Or what nerve power had been snatched from him by the terrible descent

on the farther side? But so long as his rider could pour confidence, and the power of will along the taut reins and like an electric current into the brain of the horse, so long he would run straight and true.

Under the double burden, Bister winced; then set his teeth to bulldog the thing through; and with that, he came out of the wood and the sharp, clean autumn wind was forced into his nostrils, giving life.

And here was the rest of the field just beside him, for their courses had drawn together, at the last! He turned his head to take stock of them, and as he did so, a boy who was riding close to the edge of the wood to watch this critical part of the race, screamed out and pointed to Mistral. Bister looked down, and he saw that his left leg below the knee was twisted in at a sharp angle. It was a perfectly ridiculous thing, he thought. Afterwards, he would find time to work out the meaning.

But now there was Lapwing running gloriously in the lead, and Musketeer now second, half a dozen lengths behind, with Suetonius on his quarter. On a line with Suetonius, Mistral was running.

A little fence rose before them, and Mistral dragged at it, seeming to let down and buckle up in the hind legs. A little shock, a crash, and the hind legs had crashed through. Thank God that it was a rotten piece of wood.

They were through, but what about Mistral? His ears were still pricked; still his stride seemed long and light; but there was just the faintest suspicion of sinking, Bister thought, in every movement—and he knew that the big gray was on the very verge of dropping with exhaustion. He was beaten!

So he threw a desperate, unhappy glance towards Lapwing, and now it seemed to him that Lapwing himself faltered a little. And Musketeer with flattened ears and gaping mouth seemed to be tearing at the bit to get away—seemed to be, but was not. Suetonius, too, was still stretched out straight and true. But then Bister saw that every one of those riders was leaning on the stiff reins, even as he was leaning, pushing their horses ahead with the power of the will, with the mighty effort of the soul. Suddenly it appeared to Bister that they were mounted upon three mere silhouettes—mere shadows—the strength was the strength of the riders only.

Lapwing eight lengths ahead; and only two humble little fences and a stretch of smoothest, compacted turf; and beyond that the dark, swirling mob of people waiting, and screaming all together so that their voices beat on the ear of Bister like the moan of a dozen factory whistles, artfully out of harmony.

How to get something out of nothing!

He leaned forward, shifted his weight gradually, with care towards the withers. It had to be done inch by inch, for his left foot was a lump of useless weight in the stirrup and he had to support himself by the grip of his knees alone, on that side.

The voice of the colonel rang suddenly out of the shadowy years: "My boy, a horse is ridden with the knees and the brain—not with the stirrup and the spur!"

And it seemed to Bister that Mistral lightened a little; yes, he had undoubtedly lengthened his stride, for a faster stride he could not take; and Suetonious and Musketeer were snatched to the rear—blotted out. Only

the purple and white before him; and he could see Lapwing wavering!

Ah, to be able to tell Mistral the good news! One effort—one grand effort, and the four lengths which separated them would be devoured.

To right, to left swarmed riders, and their shouting rattled in the ears of Bister like drums beaten at hysterical double-quick: "Lapwing! Musketeer! Lapwing! Lapwing! Suetonius! The damned gray is coming!"

"Mistral!" cried Bister and the flagging ears shot forward, and the good gray head stretched forth.

They cleared the first fence and landed lapped on Ned Sherdon. He twitched his head to the side, and Bister saw a thin face, white as the silks he wore, and grinning like a death's head in the agony of that great effort.

Now, head and head!

But neither could gain. They were running through a great double avenue of automobiles filled with madmen, standing up, screaming, beating one another, and all the voices blended and burst in the ear of Bister like a great roar of the sea except one thin, silver note that split through the chorus like most beautiful music—a girl with her hands crossed on her breast, and crying: "Mistral!" Ah, what a face of beauty, and what a voice from heaven—like a promise to Bister of success—and only dimly, somewhere in his heart, he knew he had seen that face and heard that voice before.

The great, throbbing cry of the multitude had been booming: "Lapwing!" Let them shout in vain—Lapwing is beaten—dragging back—head bobbing like a cork in

rough water—Ned Sherdon will not win this race unless the last fence gets Mistral!

But another word rode on the thunder of the crowd, now. "Musketeer! Musketeer!" And as Bister sent Mistral at the last fence he saw the brown stallion fly past him like a bolt from a bow, so true and straight, and a smile on the face of the crouched jockey. Musketeer! Oh, Philip Osborne, what a lucky buy was that!

On the wave of mad cheering the brown stallion was thrust ahead. Then, on top of an automobile at his right, Bister saw a round-shouldered youth standing, waving his arms, screeching in a voice that soared through the din like a harsh violin above the orchestra: "The whip! The whip! Mistral!"

No, whipping would do no good. He cast it from him as a useless tool. Nothing of flesh and blood would drag that terrible brown horse back to them, but something of the spirit, something like prayer might give him one taste of power.

Now, with short reins, thrusting on them, and all his heart in his voice: "Mistral!"

Look! There is a God to watch good horses, for Mistral sweeps closer; or is it that Musketeer has staggered in his stride? Ay, and the jockey looks back, smiling no more, but wielding his whip till it is a mere rhythmic flash in the sun.

And there, before them, is a thin thread of silver high in the air, a spider thread, but how much it means to pass beneath it first!

With every word a stride—"Mistral! Mistral!"—

with every stride a gain. Now on the hip, now the saddle, and now the snaky gray head, sweat-blackened, is at the shoulder, the neck of Musketeer. And then head to head. "Mistral!" And he has thrust beneath the wire first. No, not by a head, but by a full half-length, with Musketeer staggering helplessly behind.

CHAPTER XXXVI

The stewards, with excellent foresight, had provided a magnificent wreath, and it never looked better on horse that it did on the neck of Mistral after he had been walked about and recovered his wind. Cameras clicked on all sides, and the noise of voices closed around him in a steady clamor. After all, it was a victory for the county, of a county-made horse; but while Mistral tasted the sweets of victory, Chance, white of face as ever, but with burning eyes, clapped Lindley Bister into an ambulance and took him back to the tavern. With them, they carried the cup.

Chance and a doctor and Kitty Divine were the only attendants on the rider. As for Mike Divine and Tim McFarland and Gregory and the ex-pirate, Darley, they left Loomis to manage Mistral in the hour of glory. The four of them were hunting savagely through the crowd, inquiring everywhere for a slender, round-shouldered youth with a lean, pale face.

They did not find him; Lefty had disappeared.

So had the colonel, with Judge Postlethwaite, Lynmouth, and Halcyone. They had gone back to Bister Hall where they celebrated with tea. It could not be called anything other than a celebration. The judge was openly jubilant; Halcyone's face was like a star; and the colonel was alternately white and crimson with suppressed emotion. Jack Lynmouth seemed hardly less cheerful

than any of the others, but all the while he was watching the three like an eagle. He knew that the firm ground on which he had been standing had turned to treacherous bog in the last hour. In the meantime, he was given more hope by the antics of the judge, who was badgering the colonel with a continual run of badinage:

"Now, Charles," the judge would say, "what are we to do about this affair? Are we to leave Lindley without a word of congratulation? What? Not a word?"

"He'll have enough praise from the entire world," said the colonel.

"What's that to him, compared with a word from home?" said the judge.

"He's given up his home," said the colonel grimly. "Confound it, Whitney! Let this go, will you?"

"How can a man give up his blood?" said the judge.

"Whitney, let the matter drop!"

"Besides," said the judge, "he rode the race for the glory of the Bisters, you see."

"Nonsense," said the colonel, turning purple with emotion.

"However, he did," insisted the judge. "He took the way of General Bister. If it hadn't been for Sidney Bister's run, do you think that the idea of the short cut ever would have come into the mind of Lin? Answer me that."

"You talk like an idiot!" said the colonel; but suddenly he jumped up from his chair and began to walk the apartment. "The great thing was not the riding, Whitney," he exclaimed.

"What the devil was it, then?"

"I know!" cried Halcyone.

"Do you know, child?" asked the colonel, turning what was almost a scowl upon her.

"Of course," she answered happily. "When he was smashed to the ground and lay there with his leg broken —oh——!"

That thought made her wince, with a little cry.

"Go on!" commanded the colonel sternly.

"At that very moment, instead of being beaten by the pain and the fall, and the terrible loss of distance, he made up his mind what he would do! That was the great thing about the race. He decided on Syndam's Hill that instant!"

The colonel stopped to lay a hand on the head of Halcyone and tilt her face up so that he could study her eyes.

"Halycone," he said earnestly, at last, "one of these days we'll make a sportswoman out of you!"

And they smiled at one another with an infinite understanding that made Jack Lynmouth more and more uncomfortable.

"My training told, in the long run," said the judge, leaning benignantly back in his chair.

"*Your* training?" thundered the colonel.

"Certainly," said the judge. "'Balance, Lindley,' I always used to say to him; 'Balance, Lindley, is what makes the horseman!' And what but exquisite sense of balance kept him on the back of Mistral—with a broken leg, going down Syndam Hill?"

"Balance! Bah!" roared the colonel. "'Knees and brain! Knees and brain!' I've always told him, 'Not

the spur and the stirrup, but the knees and the brain,' and by God, in the middle of the race, you can be sure that my lessons came back into his mind."

"I'll ask him," said the judge. "I'll see which lesson he thought about. Let's go ask him, now!"

"No!" said the colonel. "I'll not crawl to him now that he's triumphant—with glory and a fortune in his pocket. Damn me if I'll go to him now!"

The butler—how insignificent a figure compared with the noble stature of Gregory!—entered and murmured to the colonel:

"This note, sir!"

The colonel took it, and used the envelope as a truncheon to emphasize his gesticulations as soon as the butler had gone out again.

"To rob me of my tried servants!" cried the colonel. "To sneak from the house and by corrupt practices to draw after him the better part of my establishment, so that Bister Hall is turned into an infernal barn—by the eternal God, I shall never forgive him! Never! If I had a thousand years before me, and every one of the thousands years was filled with the repentance of that scapegrace——"

"Colonel Bister!" cried Halcyone faintly.

"No," thundered the colonel. "He would never be received back into the house! Never! Never!"

And he ripped open the envelope and began to read the note.

He hastily took out his spectacles and scrutinized it again. There was something about it which made him

go to the window and stare at it more closely. He was forced to wipe his eyes—no doubt the sun was in them.

And suddenly he dropped the note in the lap of the judge and exclaimed in a broken voice: "Read it, Whitney! Read it aloud, and tell me that I've not read it wrong."

The judge read aloud:

"I couldn't come to beg your forgiveness for all the careless, cruel, hasty things I've done. I couldn't come when I was beaten, you understand. But now that I've won I'd come if I could. I can't come, as you know. So I beg you to come to me, sir, if you will. Otherwise, this day will be a sad one, after all. Not that I want you to change a single one of your plans. God knows it's not Bister Hall that I want, but you and your love, sir!

LINDLEY.

P.S. They say that Mistral was done at the end. It's not true. He was coming again!"

The colonel had taken the darkest corner of the room, where he sat with a bowed head, and the judge, after a moment, said furiously: "Halcyone, you little fool, why are you blubbering?"

"B-b-because," moaned Halcyone, "It's so be-be-beautiful, Uncle Whitney!"

"Bah!" said the judge, blowing his nose tremendously. "These women—no sense about things—maudlin creatures. You agree, colonel? Maudlin idiots, the women are?"

"I can't go to him," said the colonel slowly. "I've sworn——"

Halcyone ran to him.

"A bad oath *ought* to be broken," said she. "A minister told me once that——"

"Oh, damn the ministers," said the colonel.

"And Lindley loves you so, Colonel Bister!"

"Ha?" barked the colonel.

"Loves you more than anyone in the world."

"A fine way he's taken of showing it!" said the colonel.

"He's won the race for you," said Halcyone.

"My dear Halcyone," broke in Lynmouth, speaking with polite derision which was a very faint tone indeed, for his inward agony. "My dear Halcyone, you really must not say that he won the race for Colonel Bister!"

"Weren't the colonel's colors on his back?" cried Halcyone. "And didn't everyone say: 'The colonel always has real horses!' "

"Ha?" said the colonel, much less fiercely. "Keep out of here, will you?" he bellowed at the butler.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said that frightened servant. "But the fact is that a most extraordinary young man is at the door and insists on seeing you, sir."

"What? Some beggar?"

"Sir, he seems to have something to say."

"Well——"

The colonel left the room and in the hall found a slender, round-shouldered youth.

"What are you doing here, Lefty?" he asked with great kindness. "Did your master send you over with a message?"

"I got no master," said Lefty. "I've come here on my own account, and I want to talk to you——"

"Ah?" murmured the colonel, turning cold. "And about what, my lad? I'm very busy."

"About the breaking of the cinch on Mistral!" said Lefty.

The colonel gasped.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Hold on! Is Mr. Lynmouth here?"

"He is. What about that?"

"I want to say my piece before him."

"Extraordinary," said the colonel, but there was so much pent up fire in this boy that suddenly he gave way and led the youngster straight into the library where Lynmouth and the rest were waiting. "This boy," said the colonel, "is talking very queerly, and he says that he wants you to hear what he has to say. What's it about, Jack? Do you know? Gad, my boy, you look very sick! What's the mystery?"

If there had been the slightest warning, no doubt Lynmouth could have borne up under the strain. But there had been no warning whatever, and the result was that, as the colonel had said, he looked very sick indeed.

"Here's the mystery," said Lefty. And he held out his hand with a glittering diamond in the palm of it. "Mr. Lynmouth, he's lost a diamond lately, ain't he? Lost it? Sure. He gave it to me. It was the advance payment for a job I was to do. And the cutting of the cinch was my work to earn the rest of the coin that was to come."

"A complete, absolute, and perfect lie!" declared Jack Lynmouth. "Did Lindley Bister hire you to come here with this foul story?"

"Look at 'em, Lynmouth," said Lefty. "They don't believe you. But I tell you what, Lynmouth, God wouldn't let a horse like Mistral lose—even after he'd been stole from me."

"The poor boy is undoubtedly a little mad!" said Jack Lynmouth.

And he managed a very good laugh as he turned to the others. Halcyone was looking at the floor; the judge was a frozen image of horror; and the colonel, his back turned, stared out the window at the golden face of the autumn.

"Good heavens, sir," cried Lynmouth. "You wouldn't give the slightest credence to a rat of a——"

He did not finish the sentence. The terrible silence ate away all the metal of his strength and suddenly he walked —almost rushed—from the room.

Lefty, snarling like a dog as he passed, flung the unset diamond in his face.

"Worse'n Salt Creek, ain't it?" said Lefty.

Jack Lynmouth strode on—but old habit is the master of us all, and his sense of thrift could not be entirely overlooked, so, as he came to the door, he leaned and picked up the diamond from the spot where it had rolled.

After all, who would be an utter fool and throw away a diamond after Bister Hall—and seven millions?

CHAPTER XXXVII

In his automobile, the judge, with Halcyone and the colonel, drew softly up to the curb in Borrogate, and heard a crashing chorus ring from the windows of the tavern:

> "Go down, go down, go down through the whin, ye—
> Down, down to Peterby spinney.
> For there they've found! D'ye hear him tell?
> It's Dapple, Dapple—"

The singing stopped short, a few voices bawling out a note or two after the rest.

"Have they stopped because we're here?" said the colonel, uneasily. For some of the grinning listeners on that side of the street had hurried across towards the tavern as the car pulled up. "I'll go up," he added, "and tell them to keep up their celebration. Are you coming, judge?"

"Later," said the judge.

"No, Whitney. Come along, and bring Halcyone."

They went, all three, but when they came to the door of the room, Kitty Divine came out to meet them. She seemed much too worked up to heed the dignity of these callers. She merely shook her head at the colonel and judge.

"You!" she said to Halcyone. "You better come in, and the rest stay out. The fools have sung him into a delirium. I told 'em that they would. Now he's lyin' there and ravin' about Mistral and you."

"About me!" whispered Halcyone.

"Does it surprise you?" asked Kitty in a bitter voice, and peering into the face of Halcyone. "And are you gunna be standoffish and cold about it? Take what God gives you, Miss Tiverton, and remember that sometimes He don't offer the same gift twice over. You go on in and take charge. I'm gunna go home," she added, with a break in her voice. "I'm jus' tired out with horses—and men—and everything——"

She went down the hall and disappeared in the dimness; Halcyone went into the room—and the moments passed.

It is a shameful thing to say that Judge Postlethwaite, though a former ornament of the bench, now was on his knees with his eye clapped to the keyhole of that door. And the colonel leaned beside him, whispering:

"What's happening?"

"Shut up!" said the judge in a similar whisper.

"Is he delirious still?" asked the colonel.

"Shut up!" said the judge.

"Whitney, what's happening, in the name of God?"

"The idiot girl is blubbering like a perfect fool!" said the judge, in an ecstacy of impatience.

"Lindley should be horsewhipped!" said the colonel. "By heaven, he should be! Horsewhipped till his back was raw! But he's out of his head!"

"He don't look it," said the judge. "By the Lord!" he added in a whisper.

"What?" asked the colonel. "What, man?"

"Good!" said the judge.

"Postlethwaite, what do you mean?"

"Perfect!" sighed the judge.

"Confound you, judge! What is it?"

The judge rose and grasped the arm of the colonel.

"Come away!" said he.

"But—" said the judge.

"Come away, boy. We're not wanted. The work is done! We can play now, Charlie!"

He dragged the colonel into the battered, tattered, barroom, where Clancy Muldoon presided and served a host, in the front ranks of which stood Gregory, Chance, Tim McFarland, Mike Divine, and Tod Loomis.

"Cider!" called the judge, and the hands of the judge and the colonel were filled.

"To the wedding, Charles!" cried the judge.

"To the wedding, you scoundrel!" cried the colonel. "Every glass to the brim. Gregory, tumble behind the bar and help Muldoon! Are you ready, all? To the wedding, and to Mistral, God bless him!"

THE END

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